

(19) World Intellectual Property
Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
8 December 2005 (08.12.2005)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2005/116772 A1

(51) International Patent Classification⁷: G03F 7/20,
G02B 5/30, 27/28

(21) International Application Number:
PCT/EP2005/050981

(22) International Filing Date: 4 March 2005 (04.03.2005)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
10/852,099 25 May 2004 (25.05.2004) US

(71) Applicants (for all designated States except US): CARL ZEISS SMT AG [DE/DE]; Carl-Zeiss-Str. 22, 73447 Oberkochen (DE). ASML HOLDING NV [NL/NL]; De Run 6501, NL-5504 DR Veldhoven (NL).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): ALBERT, Michael [US/US]; 2730 High Ridge Road, Stamford, Connecticut 06903 (US). FIOLKA, Damian [DE/DE]; Heckenrosenweg 36, 73447 Oberkochen (DE).

(74) Agents: SCHULTZ, Joerg et al.; c/o Carl Zeiss AG Patentabteilung, 73446 Oberkochen (DE).

(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NA, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW.

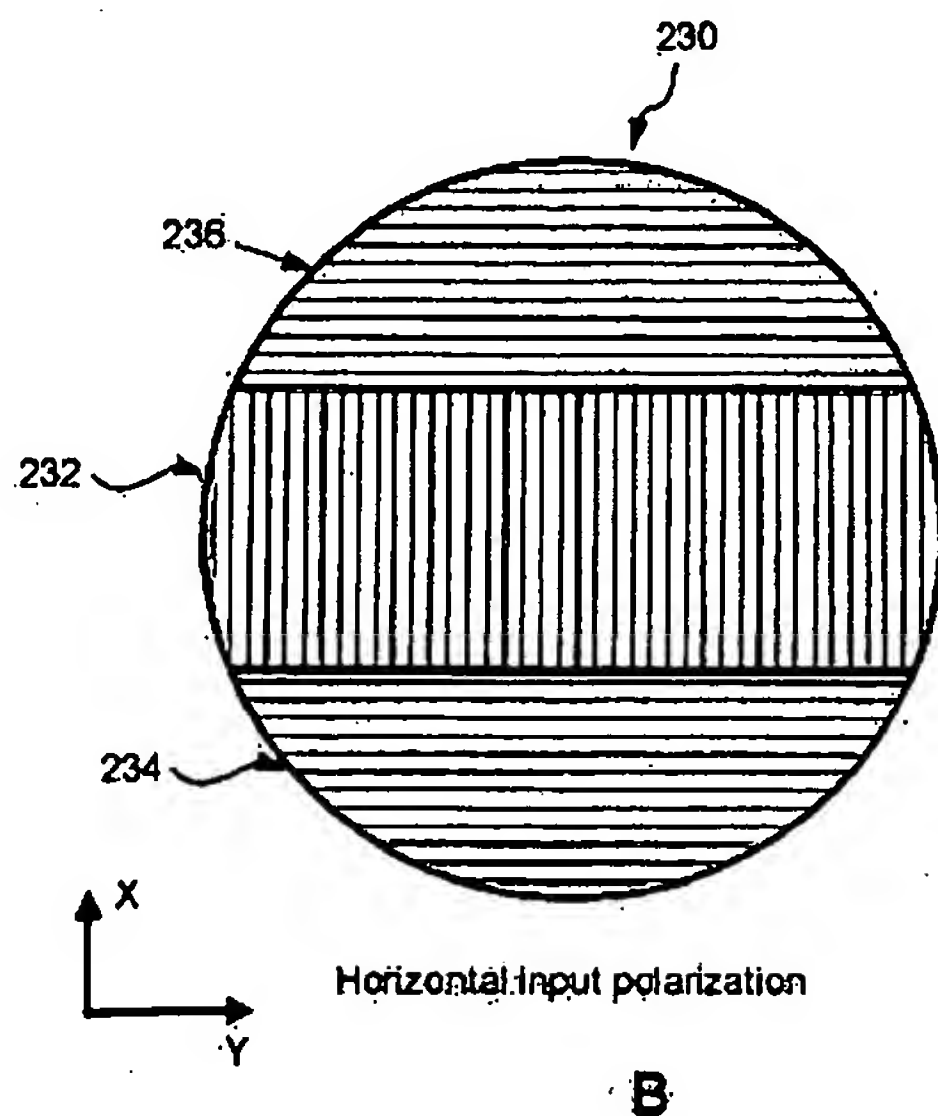
(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, MC, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

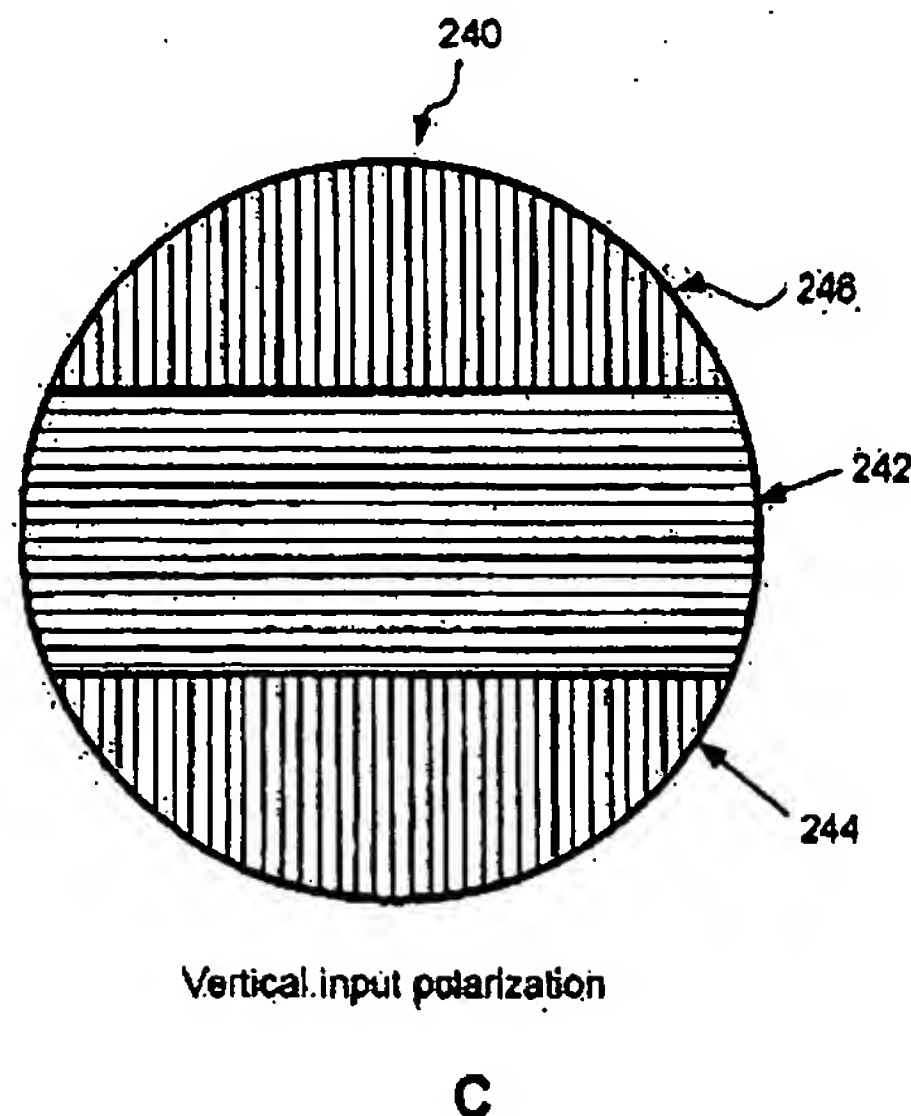
— with international search report

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) Title: APPARATUS FOR PROVIDING A PATTERN OF POLARIZATION



B



C

(57) Abstract: The present invention relates to a polarization pattern assembly for use in an illuminator and an apparatus for providing at least one polarization pattern in a pupil of an illuminator for a lithography system. A polarization pattern assembly for use in an illuminator having a pupil comprises a frame (110) and at least one polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) coupled to said frame (110), said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) changing a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough, whereby at least one polarization pattern can be obtained across the pupil of the illuminator, and wherein said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) comprises an optically active material.

APPARATUS FOR PROVIDING A PATTERN OF POLARIZATION

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to optical systems that provide light beams with polarization that varies along the cross section of the beam.

2. Description of the related art

In order to create faster and more sophisticated circuitry, the semiconductor industry continually strives to reduce the size of the circuit elements. The circuits are produced primarily by photolithography. In this process, the circuits are printed onto a semiconductor substrate by exposing a coating of radiation sensitive material to light. The radiation sensitive material is often referred to as a "photoresist" or just resist. Passing the light through a mask, which may consist of a pattern of chrome or other opaque material formed on a transparent substrate, generates the desired circuit pattern. The mask may also be formed by a pattern of higher and lower regions etched into the surface of a transparent substrate, or some combination of the two techniques. Subsequent thermal or chemical processing removes only the exposed or only the unexposed regions of the resist (depending on the material) leaving regions of the substrate bare for further processing which in turn produces the electronic circuit.

Projection exposure systems with a higher numerical aperture and shorter exposure wavelength are desired in order to achieve the highest resolutions and decrease the critical dimension (CD) of features being fabricated. Now the polarization of the exposure light at a reticle and at a wafer can have a substantial impact on imaging. For example, polarization at the reticle (or mask) affects the lithographic performance in several ways. First, the interaction of the illumination with features of the reticle, say, for example, dense lines of chrome, can vary with polarization. The transmission and scattering at a mask then depends on the polarization of the light and features of the mask. Second, reflections at the surfaces of lenses and mirrors are polarization dependent so that apodization and to a lesser degree the wave front of the projection optics ("P.O.") depend on polarization. Also, the reflection from the surface of the resist depends on polarization, and this too is effectively a polarization dependent apodization. Finally, the rays diffracted from the reticle that are brought back together at the wafer need to interfere to produce an image (also called vector interference). However, only parallel components of the electric field generally can interfere, so the polarization state of each ray at the wafer affects the coherent imaging.

Accordingly, it is increasingly desirable to provide polarized illumination in lithographic systems. Further, as demand for increased resolution and higher NA systems increases, it is increasingly desirable to control polarization across a pupil. A polarization pattern is needed such that different portions of an exposure beam have different polarizations (i.e., different polarization

directions). Desired polarization patterns include radial, tangential or other custom polarization patterns.

Heretofore, creating such polarization patterns has been difficult and expensive. One approach provides a mosaic tile structure made up of many birefringent tiles. Each tile can polarize a corresponding section of an exposure beam in a particular direction. In this way, the mosaic of tiles can create a polarization pattern, such as a radial pattern, across a pupil. See, U.S. Pat. No. 6,191,880. Such a mosaic tile structure, however, uses many tiles to provide the polarization pattern. This mosaic of tiles is complicated and difficult to manufacture. Among other things, a sandwich structure may be needed to hold the individual tiles in place across the width of the exposure beam. This is disadvantageous as differential thermal expansion across the mosaic, especially in natural birefringent crystal material, can prevent optical contact and lead to apodization (i.e. undesired intensity variations) at the pupil.

What is needed is a device that can provide polarization patterns, including radial and tangential patterns, without requiring excessively complicated mechanical structure.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention overcomes the above-mentioned problems and provides further advantages.

The present invention relates to polarization pattern illumination. A polarization pattern assembly produces a polarization pattern. In an embodiment, a polarization

pattern assembly includes a frame that supports a polarization pane in a central region of the frame. The polarization pane changes the polarization direction of light incident upon the polarization pane. The polarization pane comprises an optically active material.

Different polarization patterns in a pupil of an illuminator can then be generated by illuminating the polarization pattern assembly with linearly polarized light at a horizontal or vertical orientation. These patterns include three-zone hybrid polarization patterns, low sigma linear patterns, radial dipole patterns, tangential dipole patterns, tangential quadrapole patterns, and radial quadrapole patterns.

According to a preferred embodiment, the polarization pane comprises an optically active crystal consisting of said optically active material and having at least one optical crystal axis, wherein said one optical crystal axis and a surface normal of said polarization pane are substantially parallel to each other.

An angle between said optical crystal axis and a surface normal of said polarization pane is preferably less than 9 mrad.

According to a preferred embodiment, said polarization pane changes a direction of polarization of a light bundle consisting of a multitude of light rays with an angle distribution relative to the optical crystal axis, wherein said angle distribution has a maximum angle of incidence not exceeding 100 mrad, preferably not exceeding 50 mrad, and still more preferably not exceeding 25 mrad.

The optically active crystal may e.g. comprise quartz, TeO_2 or AgGaS_2 .

In a further embodiment, the polarization pane comprises an optically active liquid consisting of said optically active material and being enclosed in a housing, said housing being optically transparent to said light passing through the polarization pattern assembly.

According to a preferred embodiment, the polarization pane rotates the direction of polarization of light by approximately 90 degrees.

According to a preferred embodiment, the polarization pattern assembly comprises at least one region leaving a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough substantially unchanged. Such a design of the polarization pattern assembly enables an effective arrangement in providing desired polarization patterns, as discussed below in more detail, as well as an economic use of the optically active material, which does not have to extend beyond the whole cross sectional area of the polarization pattern assembly.

According to a further preferred embodiment, the polarization pattern assembly comprises on opposite sides of said polarization pane at least one pair of regions leaving a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough substantially unchanged.

The changing of the polarization direction of light passing through said polarization pane is preferably constant along a cross sectional area of said polarization pane.

The polarization pane may have the shape of one or more rectangular strips, which is particularly favourable with regard to a relatively simple manufacturing process.

According to a preferred embodiment, at least one polarization pane is coupled to said frame in a center region in between first and second outer regions within said frame, and the at least one polarization pane rotates the direction of polarization of light passing therethrough by approximately 90 degrees, whereby a polarization pattern can be obtained across the pupil of the illuminator, and the polarization pattern can include a pattern selected from a group including a three-zone hybrid polarization pattern, low sigma linear pattern, radial dipole pattern, tangential dipole pattern, tangential quadrapole pattern, and radial quadrapole patterns.

According to a further preferred embodiment, a central opening is provided, with one pair of polarization panes being coupled to said frame on opposite sides of said opening, and with one pair of regions leaving a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough substantially unchanged being coupled to said frame on opposite sides of said opening and circumferentially displaced with respect to said pair of polarization panes.

In a further embodiment, a polarized illuminator for a lithographic system is provided that includes a polarization pattern assembly. The polarization pattern assembly can be provided at or near a pupil plane or in any pupil space within the polarized illuminator.

According to a further feature, one or more beam shapers, such as a diffractive optical element or mask, can be provided on a common optical axis before or after a polarization pattern assembly. A beam shaper in combination with the polarization pattern assembly can further facilitate the generation of polarization patterns according to the present invention.

An advantage of embodiments of the present invention is that a polarization pattern assembly with a polarization pane can have a relatively simple structure yet is versatile. Such a polarization pattern assembly can produce a variety of polarization patterns by simply rotating the polarization pattern assembly relative to an incident beam, by rotating the direction of polarization of an incident beam, or by adding or modify a beam shaper.

Furthermore, and as explained below in more detail, the use of an optically active material, in particular of an optically active crystal whose optical crystal axis is parallel to the surface normal of the polarization pane in the polarization pattern assembly, results in a smooth and continuous variation of the polarization direction of passing linear polarized light as a function of thickness of the optically active material. Since the change of polarization direction of passing linear polarized light due to the circular birefringence is proportional to the thickness of the traversed optically active material, abrupt changes of the polarization state are avoided, thereby keeping moderate any requirements to thickness tolerances and manufacturing accuracy of the polarization pane.

A further advantage is realized for polarized illuminators in lithography as embodiments of the present invention can allow for a variety of polarization patterns at a particular pupil of interest.

Further embodiments, features, and advantages of the present invention, as well as the structure and operation of the various embodiments of the present invention, are described in detail below with reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated herein and form a part of the specification, illustrate the present invention and, together with the description, further serve to explain the principles of the invention and to enable a person skilled in the pertinent art to make and use the invention.

FIGs. 1A-1B are diagrams of a polarization pattern assembly according to an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 1A is a top view of the polarization pattern assembly. FIG. 1B is a side view of the polarization pattern assembly of FIG. 1A taken along line BB.

FIG. 2A is a diagram illustrating three zones of polarization created along a cross-section of an incident light beam by a polarization pattern assembly according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2B is a diagram illustrating a three-zone hybrid polarization pattern created by a polarization pattern

assembly illuminated with horizontally polarized incident light according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2C is a diagram illustrating a three-zone hybrid polarization pattern created by a polarization pattern assembly illuminated with vertically polarized incident light according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2D is a diagram further illustrating a beam shaper in combination with a polarization pattern assembly according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGS. 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6A, and 6B illustrate various polarization patterns that can be generated according to embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. 7 is a diagram illustrating a polarized illuminator including a polarization pattern assembly in a lithographic system according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGS. 8A-8B are diagrams of a polarization pattern assembly according to a further embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 8A is a top view of the polarization pattern assembly. FIG. 8B is a side view of the polarization pattern assembly of FIG. 8A taken along line BB.

FIGS. 9A-9B are diagrams of a polarization pattern assembly according to a further embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 9A is a top view of the polarization pattern assembly. FIG. 9B is a side view of the polarization pattern assembly of FIG. 9A taken along line BB.

FIGs. 10A-10B are diagrams of a polarization pattern assembly according to a further embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 10A is a top view of the polarization pattern assembly. FIG. 10B is a side view of the polarization pattern assembly of FIG. 10A taken along line BB.

FIG. 11 is a schematic diagram illustrating how the plane of oscillation is rotated when a linearly polarized light ray propagates along the optical axis in an optically active crystal.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Reference will now be made to the drawings in which the various elements of the present invention will be given numerical designations and in which the invention will be discussed so as to enable one skilled in the art to make and use the invention.

FIGs. 1A-1B are diagrams of a polarization pattern assembly 100 according to a first embodiment of the present invention. As shown in FIG. 1A, polarization pattern assembly 100 includes a frame 110 that holds polarization pane 102 in a central region of frame 110.

According to the first embodiment, polarization pane 102 is made from a crystalline material showing circular birefringence, i.e. a so-called optical active material, for example but not limited to, crystalline quartz. Suited for this purpose are optically active crystals having at least one optical crystal axis and showing a sufficient transmittance in the desired wavelength regime being used.

Suitable optically active materials, dependent on the wavelength of the radiation being used, comprise e.g. quartz, TeO_2 , and AgGaS_2 . For example TeO_2 works in a range of wavelengths from 1000 nm down to 300 nm, AgGaS_2 works from 500 nm to 480 nm, and quartz from 800 nm below 193 nm and even down to 157 nm.

In an alternate embodiment of the invention, the polarization pane may also comprise an optically active liquid being enclosed in a housing that is optically transparent to the desired radiation passing through the polarization pattern assembly. Such a liquid or solution is regarded as suitable if it exhibits a sufficient optical activity while also showing a sufficient transmittance in the desired wavelength regime being used. Suitable optically active liquids or solutions are sugar solution (which may be regularly refreshed if necessary) or tartaric acid.

According to Fig. 1B, the crystalline material of polarization pane 102 is cut perpendicular to its optical crystal axis "OA", so that the latter is perpendicular to the surface of polarization pane 102 (i.e. parallel to its surface normal). Consequently, the propagation direction of a normal incident linearly polarized light beam traversing the polarization pane 102 is parallel with the optical crystal axis "OA" of the optical active material.

In traversing of linear polarized light through the optical active material of polarization pane 102, two circular waves (as components of the linear polarized light beam) get out-of-phase and appear to have rotated, after exit of polarization pane 102, by an angle of rotation depending on wavelength, temperature and thickness of the traversed

optical active layer. Accordingly, polarization pane 102 can rotate the direction of polarization of light incident on the pane.

Figure 11 shall serve to explain in more detail the function of optically active crystals, and in particular of polarization-modulating elements made from such crystals. Optically active crystals have at least one optical axis OA which is inherent in the crystal structure. When linearly polarized light travels along this optical axis OA, the plane of oscillation of electrical field vector 801 is rotated by an angle β of proportionate magnitude as the distance d travelled by the light inside crystal 800. The proportionality factor between distance d and angle of rotation β is the specific rotation α . The latter is a material-specific quantity and is dependent on the wavelength of the light rays propagating through the crystal. For example in natural quartz, the specific rotation at a wavelength of 193nm was measured as $(325.2 \pm 0.5)^\circ/\text{mm}$; in synthetic quartz, the specific rotation at a wavelength of 193nm amounts to $(323.1 \pm 0.5)^\circ/\text{mm}$. Both values are given for a temperature of 20°C.

In particular, light that propagates inside the crystal 800 along the optical axis OA is not subject to a linear birefringence. Thus, when a linearly polarized light ray traverses an optically active crystal 800 along the optical axis OA, its state of polarization remains the same except for the change in the spatial orientation of the plane of oscillation of electrical field vector 801 which depends on the distance d travelled by the light ray inside crystal 800.

In the meaning of the present application, and going back to Fig. 1A and 1B, the definition that the optical crystal axis of polarization pane 102 is substantially parallel to its surface normal, such orientations are regarded as being comprised wherein an angle between an optical crystal axis of polarization pane 102 and its surface normal is less than 9 mrad, more preferably less than 5 mrad, and still more preferably less than 3 mrad.

In the exemplary embodiment of polarization pane 102 being made of crystalline quartz, the thickness "d" of polarization pane 102 along the optical crystalline axis can e.g. be selected as $d \approx (N \cdot 278) \pm 2 \mu\text{m}$ for an exemplarily temperature of 20°C, in order to achieve a net 90°-rotation of polarization direction, with N representing an odd positive number less than 10 (i.e. $N=1, 3, \dots, 9$). Tolerances in thickness "d" of less than roughly 1 % of polarization pane 102 have shown to be still acceptable and are lying within the range to achieve a net rotation of polarization direction of "substantially 90°".

Plates of crystalline quartz having the above orientations and manufacturing tolerances are commercially available in sizes of e.g. $(50 \cdot 130) \text{mm}^2$, so that polarization pane 102 is realizable from one single piece thereby avoiding any undesired borders and enhanced design complexity.

Regions 104 and 106 shown in Fig. 1A and 1B pass light through without significantly changing the direction of polarization. Accordingly, the polarization pattern assembly 100 comprises on opposite sides of polarization pane 102 one pair of regions 104 and 106 leaving a direction of

polarization of light passing therethrough substantially unchanged.

According to the first embodiment of Fig. 1A and 1B, regions 104 and 106 are devoid of any plate, pane or the like, i.e. realized as solid-material-free regions.

In an alternate embodiment of a polarization pattern assembly 800 shown in Fig. 8A and 8B, regions 104 and 106 can be realized by providing, in each of regions 104 and 106, a pane 107 or 108, respectively, each being made of non-birefringent and non-optically active material, for example but not limited to fused silica or calcium fluoride (CaF_2).

Accordingly, also the polarization pattern assembly 800 shown in Fig. 8A and 8B comprises on opposite sides of polarization pane 102 one pair of regions 104 and 106 leaving a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough substantially unchanged.

Panes 107 and 108 in polarization pattern assembly 800 help to reduce an undesired intensity variation due to significantly different light attenuations in regions 104, 106 and pane 102 (so-called "polbalance"), as well as path length differences between rays travelling through polarization pattern assembly 100. To optimally meet the latter task, the thicknesses of panes 102, 107 and 108 preferably meet an equation $n_1 \cdot d_1 \approx n \cdot d \approx n_2 \cdot d_2$, wherein n_1 and n_2 denote the refractive index of pane 107 or 108, respectively, d_1 and d_2 denote the thickness of pane 107 or 108, respectively, n denotes the refractive index of pane 102, and d denotes the thickness of panes 102. If the above equation is met, the optical path lengths of light rays passing panes 102, 107 and 108 are substantially equal.

In general, frame 110 can be any shape and area suitable for holding panes 102-106 in accordance with a desired form factor or other design criteria. In an embodiment, pane 102 and regions 104, 106 are rectangular (or square) and frame 110 likewise has a rectangular (or square) shape and an area large enough to hold pane 102 as shown in FIGs. 1A-1B or panes 102, 107 and 108 shown in Fig. 1C. The present invention is however not intended to be so limited, and other shapes can be used for panes 102, 107 and 108, regions 104, 106 and frame 110 as would be apparent to a person skilled in the art given this description.

Polarization pattern assembly 100 or 800 can be inserted in an optical path of any optical system including, but not limited to, an illuminator having a pupil plane. FIGS. 1A and 8A further show an imaging area 150 that can correspond to the area of polarization pattern assembly 100 that falls within a pupil of an optical system (not shown). In the examples of FIG. 1A and FIG. 8A, imaging area 150 has three zones corresponding to respective areas of panes 102-106. Since polarization pane 102 has a different polarization property than regions 104 and 106, a polarization pattern will be imparted across a pupil of the optical system.

The operation of polarization assembly 100 or 800 including the generation of particular polarization patterns is described further with respect to FIGS. 2-6 (in the following exemplarily for but not limited to polarization assembly 100). Three-zone hybrid polarization patterns can be created. In FIG. 2A, an incident light beam 210 passes through polarization pattern assembly 100 which outputs an output beam 220. Incident light beam 210 can be linearly polarized

along an x-axis (also called a horizontal direction). FIG. 2B shows a resultant three-zone hybrid polarization pattern 230 created by polarization pattern assembly 100 when illuminated with an incident light beam 210 that is linearly polarized in a horizontal direction. Pattern 230 includes a center zone 232 in between two outer zones 234, 236. Light in center zone 232 has passed through polarization pane 102 and is now vertically polarized. Light in outer zone 234 has passed through region 104 and remains horizontally polarized. Light in outer zone 236 has passed through region 106 and also remains horizontally polarized.

Alternatively, incident light beam 210 can be linearly polarized along a y-axis (also called a vertical direction). FIG. 2C shows a resultant three-zone hybrid polarization pattern 240 created by polarization pattern assembly 100 when illuminated with an incident light beam 210 that is linearly polarized in a vertical direction. Pattern 240 includes a center zone 242 in between two outer zones 244, 246. Light in center zone 242 has passed through polarization pane 102 and is now horizontally polarized. Light in outer zone 244 has passed through region 104 and remains vertically polarized. Light in outer zone 246 has passed through region 106 and also remains vertically polarized.

In this way, an advantage of polarization pattern assembly 100 is that different polarization patterns can be attained simply by inputting horizontally or vertically polarized light. This could be achieved in a number of ways including but not limited to: providing a linear polarizer at a source and rotating the polarizer in a horizontal or vertical orientation relative to polarization pattern assembly 100

and/or rotating polarization pattern assembly 100 relative to a linearly polarized light source.

According to a further feature, a beam shaper can also be provided in combination with a polarization pattern assembly to generate additional patterns. FIG. 2D is a diagram illustrating a beam shaper 250 in combination with a polarization pattern assembly 100 according to an embodiment of the present invention. Beam shaper 250 can be a diffractive optic or mask that shapes an incident beam 210 and then passes the shaped beam to polarization pattern assembly 100 which outputs an output beam 260. Alternatively, beam shaper 250 can be provided on the other side of polarization pattern assembly 100 to receive light that has passed through polarization pattern assembly 100. FIGS. 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6A, and 6B illustrate additional polarization patterns that can be generated using a beam shaper 250 in combination with polarization pattern assembly 100 according to embodiments of the present invention.

Low sigma linear patterns can be created (FIGS. 3A and 3B). FIG. 3A shows a resultant low sigma linear vertical polarization pattern 300A created by polarization pattern assembly 100 when pane 102 is illuminated with an incident light beam 210 that is linearly polarized in a horizontal direction. Pattern 300A includes a center zone 310A surrounded by a concentric outer zone 320A. Light in center zone 310A has passed through polarization pane 102 and is now vertically polarized. Light is not present in outer zone 320A due to beam shaper 250. Beam shaper 250 can be a mask having a concentric circle shape that occludes light in zone 320A. Alternatively, beam shaper 250 can be diffractive optics or other types of optical components that direct incident light

only to pane 102 in zone 310A. Beam shaper 250 can even be omitted if an incident beam size is narrow enough to impinge only on pane 102.

Similarly, FIG. 3B shows a resultant low sigma linear horizontal polarization pattern 300B created by polarization pattern assembly 100 when pane 102 is illuminated with an incident light beam 210 that is linearly polarized in a vertical direction. Pattern 300B includes a center zone 310B surrounded by a concentric outer zone 320B. Light in center zone 310B has passed through polarization pane 102 and is now horizontally polarized. Light is not present in outer zone 320B due to beam shaper 250 or beam size as described above with respect to FIG. 3A.

In this way, an advantage of polarization pattern assembly 100 is that either low sigma linear polarization patterns (horizontal or vertical) can be attained simply by inputting horizontally or vertically polarized light.

Tangential and radial quadrapole patterns can be created (FIGs. 4A and 4B). FIG. 4A shows a resultant tangential quadrapole polarization pattern 400A created by polarization pattern assembly 100 and beam shaper 250 when illuminated with an incident light beam 210 that is linearly polarized in a horizontal direction. Pattern 400A includes four pole regions 410A, 412A, 414A, and 416A having tangential polarized light. Pole regions 410A, 412A, 414A, and 416A can be formed around in outer peripheral zone of a pupil by beam shaper 250. Light in pole regions 414A, 416A has passed through polarization pane 102 and is now vertically polarized. Light in pole region 410A has passed through region 106 and remains horizontally polarized. Light in pole

region 412A has passed through region 104 and also remains horizontally polarized. Light is not present in a spoke wheel shape zone 420A. Beam shaper 250 can be a mask having a spoke wheel shape that occludes light in zone 420A. Alternatively, beam shaper 250 can be diffractive optics or other types of optical components that direct incident light only to regions of polarization pattern assembly 100 corresponding to pole regions 410A, 412A, 414A, and 416A.

FIG. 4B shows a resultant radial quadrapole polarization pattern 400B created by polarization pattern assembly 100 and beam shaper 250 when illuminated with an incident light beam 210 that is linearly polarized in a vertical direction. Pattern 400B includes four pole regions 410B, 412B, 414B and 416B having radial polarized light. Pole regions 410B, 412B, 414B, and 416B can be formed around in outer peripheral zone of a pupil by beam shaper 250. Light in pole regions 414B, 416B has passed through polarization pane 102 and is now horizontally polarized. Light in pole region 410B has passed through region 106 and remains vertically polarized. Light in pole region 412B has passed through region 104 and also remains vertically polarized. Light is not present in a spoke wheel shape zone 420B. Beam shaper 250 can be a mask having a spoke wheel shape that occludes light in zone 420B. Alternatively, beam shaper 250 can be diffractive optics or other types of optical components that direct incident light only to regions of polarization pattern assembly 100 corresponding to pole regions 410B, 412B, 414B, and 416B.

In this way, an advantage of polarization pattern assembly 100 in combination with beam shaper 250 is that tangential and radial quadrapole patterns can be attained simply by inputting horizontally or vertically polarized light.

Radial dipole patterns can be created (FIGs. 5A and 5B). FIG. 5A shows a resultant radial dipole polarization pattern 500A created by polarization pattern assembly 100 and beam shaper 250 when illuminated with an incident light beam 210 that is linearly polarized in a vertical direction. Pattern 500A includes two pole regions 510A, 512A having radial polarized light. Pole regions 510A, 512A can be formed around at the top and bottom of an outer peripheral zone of a pupil by beam shaper 250. Light in pole region 510A has passed through region 106 and remains vertically polarized. Light in pole region 512A has passed through region 104 and also remains vertically polarized. Light is not present in a bow tie shape zone 520A. Beam shaper 250 can be a mask having a bow tie shape that occludes light in zone 520A. Alternatively, beam shaper 250 can be diffractive optics or other types of optical components that direct incident light only to regions of polarization pattern assembly 100 corresponding to pole regions 510A, 512A.

FIG. 5B shows a resultant radial dipole polarization pattern 500B created by polarization pattern assembly 100 and beam shaper 250 when illuminated with an incident light beam 210 that is linearly polarized in a vertical direction. Pattern 500B includes two pole regions 510B, 512B having radial polarized light. Pole regions 510B, 512B can be formed around at left and right sides of an outer peripheral zone of a pupil by beam shaper 250. Light in pole regions 510B, 512B has passed through polarization pane 102 and is vertically polarized. Light is not present in a bow tie shape zone 520B. Beam shaper 250 can be a mask having a bow tie shape that occludes light in zone 520B. Alternatively, beam shaper 250 can be diffractive optics or other types of optical

components that direct incident light only to regions of polarization pattern assembly 100 corresponding to pole regions 510B, 512B.

In this way, an advantage of polarization pattern assembly 100 in combination with beam shaper 250 is that radial dipole patterns can be attained simply by inputting vertically polarized light and using beam shaper 250 to direct light to top and bottom regions or left and right side regions. For example, when beam shaper 250 is a bowtie-shaped mask it can be simply be rotated to occlude light in zone 520A or 520B.

Tangential dipole patterns can be created (FIGs. 6A and 6B). FIG. 6A shows a resultant tangential dipole polarization pattern 600A created by polarization pattern assembly 100 and beam shaper 250 when illuminated with an incident light beam 210 that is linearly polarized in a horizontal direction. Pattern 600A includes two pole regions 610A, 612A having tangential polarized light. Pole regions 610A, 612A can be formed at the left and right of an outer peripheral zone of a pupil by beam shaper 250. Light in pole regions 610A, 612A has passed through polarization pane 102 and is vertically polarized. Light is not present in a bow tie shape zone 620A. Beam shaper 250 can be a mask having a bow tie shape that occludes light in zone 620A. Alternatively, beam shaper 250 can be diffractive optics or other types of optical components that direct incident light only to regions of polarization pattern assembly 100 corresponding to pole regions 610A, 612A.

FIG. 6B shows a resultant tangential dipole polarization pattern 600B created by polarization pattern assembly 100 and beam shaper 250 when illuminated with an incident light beam

210 that is linearly polarized in a horizontal direction. Pattern 600B includes two pole regions 610B, 612B having tangential polarized light. Pole regions 610B, 612B can be formed at a top and bottom of an outer peripheral zone of a pupil by beam shaper 250. Light in pole region 610B has passed through region 106 and remains horizontally polarized. Light in pole region 612B has passed through region 104 and also remains horizontally polarized. Light is not present in a bow tie shape zone 620B. Beam shaper 250 can be a mask having a bow tie shape that occludes light in zone 620B. Alternatively, beam shaper 250 can be diffractive optics or other types of optical components that direct incident light only to regions of polarization pattern assembly 100 corresponding to pole regions 610B, 612B.

In this way, a further advantage of polarization pattern assembly 100 in combination with beam shaper 250 is that tangential dipole patterns can be attained simply by inputting horizontally polarized light and using beam shaper 250 to direct light to top and bottom regions or left and right side regions. For example, when beam shaper 250 is a bowtie shaped mask it can be simply rotated to occlude light in zone 620A or 620B.

Figs. 9A and 9B as well as Figs. 10A and 10B show further embodiments of a polarization pattern assembly according to the present invention, which are principally based on the embodiment already described with reference to Figs. 8A and 8B, but modified in order to achieve a saving of the -usually expensive- material used to realize regions 104, 106 and/or polarization pane 102.

According to the embodiment of Fig. 9A and 9B, the polarization pattern assembly 900 also comprises on opposite sides of polarization pane 102 one pair of regions leaving a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough substantially unchanged.

Similar to the embodiment of a polarization pattern assembly 800 shown in Fig. 8A and 8B, regions 104 and 106 are realized by providing, in each of regions 104 and 106, a pane 111 or 112, respectively, each being made of non-birefringent and non-optically active material, for example but not limited to fused silica or calcium fluoride (CaF_2).

The only difference with respect to Fig. 8A and 8B is that panes 111 and 112 of polarization pattern assembly 900 do not extend over the whole region 104 or 106, respectively, but have a reduced dimension and size in order to cover substantially only a region of interest, e.g. an area which is in fact traversed by irradiation. Since the remaining features of polarization pattern assembly 900 shown in Figs. 9A and 9B correspond to those of polarization pattern assembly 800 shown in Fig. 8A and 8B, corresponding elements have been marked with same reference signs and their detailed description is omitted.

The exemplary embodiment of Figs. 9A and 9B is particularly suitable for dipole or quadrapole illumination modes, in order to provide e.g. the dipole or quadrapole polarization patterns discussed above with reference to Fig. 4A (tangential quadrapole), Fig. 4B (radial quadrapole), Fig. 5A (radial dipole) and Fig. 6B (tangential dipole).

Like panes 107 and 108 in embodiment of Fig. 8A and 8B, size-reduced panes 111 and 112 meet their task to reduce undesired intensity variations and path length differences, while also saving material in some, most or all the remaining region not passed by irradiation. Like in the embodiment of Fig. 8A and 8B, the thicknesses of panes 102, 111 and 112 preferably meet an equation $n_1 \cdot d_1 \approx n \cdot d \approx n_2 \cdot d_2$, wherein n_1 and n_2 denote the refractive index of pane 111 or 112, respectively, d_1 and d_2 denote the thickness of pane 111 or 112, respectively, n denotes the refractive index of pane 102, and d denotes the thickness of panes 102. If the above equation is met, the optical path lengths of light rays passing panes 102, 111 and 112 are substantially equal.

Panes 111 and 112 can be of any shape and area suitable for meeting the above tasks. Although in the embodiment of Figs. 8A and 8B, panes 102, 111 and 112 are rectangular (or square), the present invention is not intended to be so limited and other suitable shapes can be used for panes 102, 111 and 112.

Going now to Fig. 10A and Fig. 10B, regions 104 and 106 are (like in Fig. 9A and Fig. 9B) realized by providing, in each of regions 104 and 106, a pane 111 or 112, respectively, each being made of non-birefringent and non-optically active material, for example but not limited to fused silica or calcium fluoride (CaF_2). Accordingly, the polarization pattern assembly 950 also comprises on opposite sides of a polarization pane one pair of regions leaving a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough substantially unchanged.

The only difference with respect to Fig. 9A and 9B is that a polarization pane of polarization pattern assembly 950 does not extend over the whole central region between regions 104 and 106, but comprises two separate panes 102a and 102b, both being plan-parallel and made of an optically active crystal. The only difference between panes 102a,b and pane 102 is that panes 102a and 102b have a reduced dimension and size in order to cover substantially only a region of interest, e.g. an area which is in fact traversed by irradiation. In polarization pattern assembly 950, a central opening 113 (at the position of the optical axis OA illustrated in Fig. 10B) is provided within frame 110, with polarization panes 102a and 102b being coupled to frame 110 on opposite sides of opening 113, and with the pair of regions 111 and 112 leaving a direction of polarization unchanged being arranged on opposite sides of opening 113 and circumferentially displaced by 90° with respect to polarization panes 102a or 102b, respectively. Since the remaining features of the polarization pattern assembly 950 shown in Figs. 10A and 10B correspond to those of polarization pattern assembly 900 of Fig. 9A and 9B, corresponding elements have been marked with same reference signs and their detailed description is omitted.

Of course, the invention is not limited to the specific shape, size and arrangement shown in Fig. 10A and 10B, so other suitable arrangements are apparent to a skilled person given this description in order to cover substantially only a region of interest, e.g. an area which is in fact traversed by irradiation, with the respective optically active material (for panes 102, 102a, 102b) or with the non-birefringent and non optically active material (for regions 111, 112).

Like the exemplary embodiment of Figs. 9A and 9B, also the exemplary embodiment of Figs. 10A and 10B is particularly suitable for dipole or quadrapole illumination modes, in order to provide e.g. the dipole or quadrapole polarization patterns discussed above with reference to Fig. 4A (tangential quadrapole), Fig. 4B (radial quadrapole), Fig. 5A (radial dipole) and Fig. 6B (tangential dipole).

FIG. 7 is a diagram illustrating a polarized illuminator 700 including a polarization pattern assembly 100 (or alternatively e.g. a polarization pattern assembly 800, 900, 950, ...) and/or beam shaper 750 in a lithographic system according to an embodiment of the present invention. Beam shaper 750 and polarization pattern assembly 100 are arranged along a common optical path of illuminator 700. Beam shaper 750 can include first beam shaper element 750A and second beam shaper element 750B disposed on opposite sides of polarization pattern assembly 100 as shown in FIG. 7. In one example, first beam shaper element 750A includes one or more diffractive optics (e.g. diffraction gratings) that diffract light from a light source 702 (e.g., a ultraviolet laser) into two or four diffracted beams corresponding to poles regions around a pupil of illuminator 700. Other optical lenses or components can also be provided to fill a pupil and/or field of illuminator 700 as is well-known in illuminator design. Second beam shaper element 750B can include a mask to further block undesired rays and otherwise clean up the polarization pattern at the pupil.

Polarized illuminator 700 outputs an output beam 705 of polarized illumination to mask 710. Light 715 passing through (or reflected from) mask 710 is projected by an optical system 720 (i.e., projection optics) onto a wafer 730 during

printing. This lithography system used with polarized illuminator 700 is illustrative and not intended to limit the present invention. Polarized illuminator 700 can be used in any type of lithographic system or tool as would be apparent to a person skilled in the art given this description.

According to a further feature of the present invention, output beam 705 can have any of a variety of polarization patterns at a pupil of illuminator 700 including, but not limited to, three-zone hybrid polarization patterns, low sigma linear patterns, radial dipole patterns, tangential dipole patterns, tangential quadrapole patterns, and radial quadrapole patterns. Depending upon the configuration of beam shaper 750 and polarization pattern assembly 100, polarized illuminator 700 can provide any of these patterns as described above with respect to FIGs. 2B-6B. Further, polarized illuminator 700 can be switched to provide any of these patterns depending upon the configuration of beam shaper 750 and polarization pattern assembly 100 as described above with respect to FIGs. 2B-6B. For instance, a controller (not shown) can be provided to change the configuration of beam shaper 750 and polarization pattern assembly 100 to obtain a desired pattern. In this way patterns can be automatically changed during printing to allow different polarization patterns in a pupil during exposure of a wafer. For example, a controller can move one or more diffraction gratings in beam shaper element 750A in and out of the optical path to create two or four diffracted beams (+1, -1 or greater diffracted beam orders) at the pole regions (for dipole or quadrapole patterns), and/or to simply pass a lower order beam for low order sigma linear patterns. Likewise, polarization pattern assembly 100 can be rotated around an optical axis of the optical path so that input linearly

polarized light is along a horizontal or vertical direction depending upon the polarization pattern which desired. Finally, one or more masks in beam shaper element 750B can also be moved in and out of the optical path through illuminator 700 and rotated so that a mask shape (e.g., a concentric circle, spoke-wheel or bow tie shape) in a desired orientation is present in accordance with the polarization pattern desired.

In certain lithographic applications, the polarization patterns illustrated in FIG. 3 may be advantageous for polarized illuminator 700 to provide. For example, such polarization modes are useful in double exposing the wafer with alternating phase shift masks. Specifically, alternating phase shift masks diffract the light in a different way from binary masks. In the case of alternating phase shift masks, the axial beam of the illuminator is diffracted symmetrically into the projection optics ("PO"). The smallest and sharpest features are achieved with a thin beam of illumination on axis. However, to get the benefit of polarization for several orientations of features at one time, one polarization can be used with a mask that has the vertically oriented structures. The wafer is then exposed again using a second polarization and a second mask with the horizontal structures.

Accordingly, the polarization patterns in FIG. 3 are useful for double exposure with alternating phase shift masks. For example, a mask with mostly vertical lines, i.e., the lines are vertical and repeat horizontally, diffracts mostly horizontally across the PO pupil. These beams recombine at the wafer more effectively if the polarization is vertical. Similarly, a second mask with mostly horizontal structures is imaged better with horizontal polarization. Both masks can be

exposed onto the same wafer without "developing the film" in between and the resulting double exposure image is better than if the whole structure had been exposed at once with unpolarized light.

In a further embodiment, the polarization patterns listed in FIG. 4 may be desired in a lithographic application. For example, using a binary mask, the very smallest vertical lines are well imaged by the vertically polarized poles on the right and left edges of the illuminator pupil as shown in FIG. 4A. The +1 and -1 diffraction order from the other two poles are diffracted outside the P0 pupil and do not make it to the wafer. Similarly, using a binary mask, the very smallest horizontal lines are well imaged by the horizontally polarized poles on the top and bottom portion of the illuminator pupil as shown in FIG. 4B. The enhancement in the contrast due to the tangential polarization in general more than makes up for the lost contrast due to the non-imaging poles. In this way, all features can be printed in a single exposure where, without polarization control, this would not be possible.

In another embodiment, the polarization patterns listed in FIGs. 5 and 6 are useful for double exposures of mostly horizontal and mostly vertical structures using binary masks. In the case of alternating phase shift masks, double exposures were chosen in order to receive the benefit of polarization. Double exposures are often used because for a given structure orientation, only two of the four poles produces an image. The other two poles do not. The +1 and -1 diffraction orders are outside the P.O. pupil. Only the zero order reaches the wafer providing no image and only contributing a contrast robbing constant background.

The present invention is not limited to lithography systems with optical systems producing the patterns of polarization described above or illustrated in the figures. Rather, for any given reticle or mask, there may be an optimal pupil fill and optimal polarization for printing. Accordingly, the present invention encompasses such optimal polarization patterns.

The polarization pane(s) used in the optical systems of the present invention can utilize optics-quality materials that transmit light of a wavelength of interest. Accordingly, the invention is not limited to use with any particular wave length of light. Example wavelengths are infrared, ultraviolet ("UV"), and visible.

While various embodiments of the present invention have been described above, it should be understood that they have been presented by way of example only, and not limitation. Thus, the breadth and scope of the present invention should not be limited by any of the above-described exemplary embodiments, but should be defined only in accordance with the following claims and their equivalents.

CLAIMS

1. A polarization pattern assembly for use in an illuminator having a pupil, comprising:
 - a frame (110); and
 - at least one polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) coupled to said frame (110), said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) changing a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough, whereby at least one polarization pattern can be obtained across the pupil of the illuminator;
 - wherein said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) comprises an optically active material.
2. The polarization pattern assembly of claim 1, wherein said at least one polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) comprises an optically active crystal consisting of said optically active material and having at least one optical crystal axis, wherein said optical crystal axis and a surface normal of said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) are substantially parallel to each other.
3. The polarization pattern assembly of claim 2, wherein an angle between said optical crystal axis and said surface normal of said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) is less than 9 mrad.
4. The polarization pattern assembly of claim 2 or 3, wherein said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) changes a direction of polarization of a light bundle consisting of a multitude of light rays with an angle distribution relative to the optical crystal axis, wherein said angle distribution has a maximum angle of incidence not

exceeding 100 mrad, preferably not exceeding 50 mrad, and still more preferably not exceeding 25 mrad.

5. The polarization pattern assembly of anyone of the claims 2 to 4, wherein said optically active crystal comprises quartz, TeO_2 or AgGaS_2 .
6. The polarization pattern assembly of claim 1, wherein said at least one polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) comprises an optically active liquid consisting of said optically active material and being enclosed in a housing, said housing being optically transparent to said light passing through the polarization pattern assembly.
7. The polarization pattern assembly of anyone of the preceding claims, wherein said at least one polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) rotates the direction of polarization of light by approximately 90 degrees.
8. The polarization pattern assembly of anyone of the preceding claims, further comprising at least one region (104, 106) leaving a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough substantially unchanged.
9. The polarization pattern assembly of claim 8, comprising on opposite sides of said polarization pane (102) at least one pair of regions (104, 106) leaving a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough substantially unchanged.
10. The polarization pattern assembly of anyone of the preceding claims, wherein said changing of the

polarization direction of light passing through said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) is constant along a cross sectional area of said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b).

11. The polarization pattern assembly of claim 10, wherein said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) has the shape of one or more rectangular strips.
12. The polarization pattern assembly of anyone of the preceding claims, wherein said at least one polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) is coupled to said frame (110) in a center region in between first and second outer regions (104, 106) within said frame (110), and wherein said at least one polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) rotates the direction of polarization of light passing therethrough by approximately 90 degrees, whereby a polarization pattern can be obtained across the pupil of the illuminator, and the polarization pattern can include a pattern selected from a group including a three-zone hybrid polarization pattern, low sigma linear pattern, radial dipole pattern, tangential dipole pattern, tangential quadrapole pattern, and radial quadrapole patterns.
13. The polarization pattern assembly of anyone of the preceding claims, wherein a central opening (113) is provided, with one pair of polarization panes (102a, 102b) being coupled to said frame (110) on opposite sides of said opening (113), and with one pair of regions (111, 112) leaving a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough substantially unchanged being coupled to said frame (110) on opposite sides of

said opening (113) and circumferentially displaced with respect to said pair of polarization panes (102a, 102b).

14. An apparatus for providing at least one polarization pattern in a pupil of an illuminator for a lithography system, comprising:
- a beam shaper (250); and
 - a polarization pattern assembly (100, 800, 900, 950) having a frame (110) and at least one polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b), said beam shaper (250) and said polarization pattern assembly (100, 800, 900, 950) being arranged along an optical path of the illuminator, wherein said frame (110) includes a center region in between first and second outer regions (104, 106) within said frame (110) and said at least one polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) is supported by said frame (110) across the center region;
 - wherein said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) comprises an optically active material.
15. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein said at least one polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) comprises an optically active crystal consisting of said optically active material and having at least one optical crystal axis, wherein said optical crystal axis and a surface normal of said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) are substantially parallel to each other.
16. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein an angle between said optical crystal axis and said surface normal of said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) is less than 9 mrad.

17. The apparatus of claim 15 or 16, wherein said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) changes a direction of polarization of a light bundle consisting of a multitude of light rays with an angle distribution relative to the optical crystal axis, wherein said angle distribution has a maximum angle of incidence not exceeding 100 mrad, preferably not exceeding 50 mrad, and still more preferably not exceeding 25 mrad.
18. The apparatus of anyone of claims 15 to 17, wherein said optically active crystal comprises quartz, TeO_2 or AgGaS_2 .
19. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein said at least one polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) comprises an optically active liquid consisting of said optically active material and being enclosed in a housing, said housing being optically transparent to said light passing through the polarization pattern assembly.
20. The apparatus of anyone of the claims 14 to 19, wherein said at least one polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) rotates the direction of polarization of light by approximately 90 degrees.
21. The apparatus of anyone of the claims 14 to 20, wherein said polarization pattern assembly comprises at least one region (104, 106) leaving a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough substantially unchanged.

22. The apparatus of claim 21, comprising on opposite sides of said polarization pane (102) at least one pair of regions (104, 106) leaving a direction of polarization of light passing therethrough substantially unchanged.
23. The apparatus of anyone of the claims 14 to 22, wherein a changing of a polarization direction of light passing through said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) is constant along a cross sectional area of said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b).
24. The apparatus of claim 23, wherein said polarization pane (102, 102a, 102b) has the shape of one or more rectangular strips.
25. The apparatus of anyone of claims 14 to 24, wherein said beam shaper (250) comprises at least one of diffractive optics and a mask.
26. The apparatus of anyone of claims 14 to 25, wherein said beam shaper (250) separates an input linearly polarized light beam into a plurality of separate polarized light beams that illuminate the polarization pattern assembly (100, 800, 900, 950) at areas associated with pole regions of the pupil.
27. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the plurality of separate polarized light beams comprise two polarized light beams that illuminate the polarization pattern assembly (100, 800, 900, 950) at areas associated with dipole regions of the pupil such that a polarization

pattern can be provided at the pupil that comprises a radial dipole pattern or tangential dipole pattern.

28. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the plurality of separate polarized light beams comprise four polarized light beams that illuminate the polarization pattern assembly (100, 800, 900, 950) at areas associated with quadrapole regions of the pupil such that a polarization pattern can be provided at the pupil that comprises a radial quadrapole pattern or tangential quadrapole pattern.
29. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein said beam shaper (250) limits an input linearly polarized light beam to a polarization pane in the center region of the pupil such that a polarization pattern can be provided at the pupil that comprises a low sigma linear polarization pattern.
30. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein said beam shaper (250) passes an input linearly polarized light beam across center and outer regions within the frame (110) such that a polarization pattern can be provided at the pupil that comprises a three-zone hybrid polarization pattern.
31. The apparatus of anyone of claims 14 to 30, wherein said beam shaper (250) and said polarization pattern assembly (100, 800, 900, 950) can be moved to generate different types of polarization patterns.

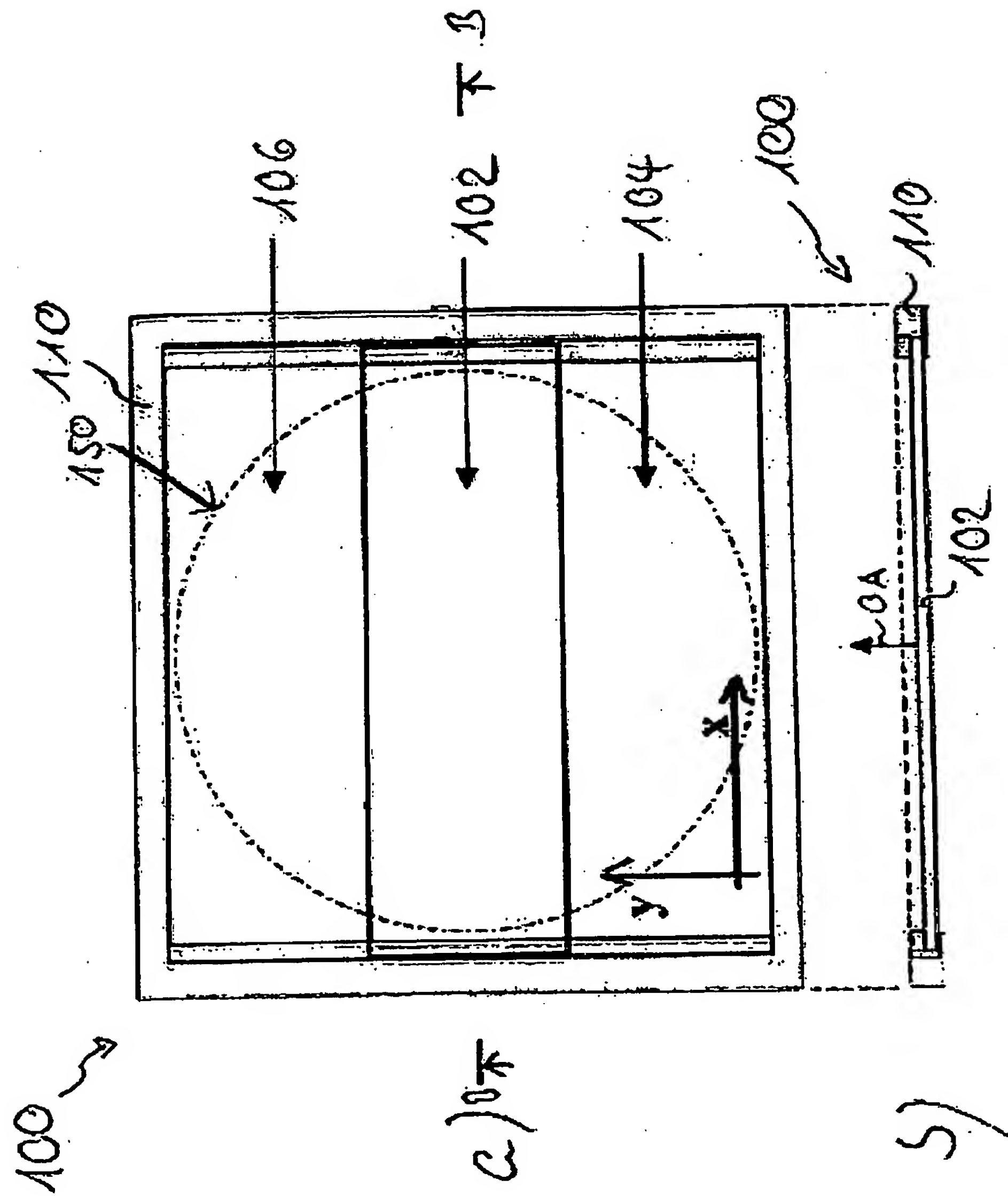


FIG..1

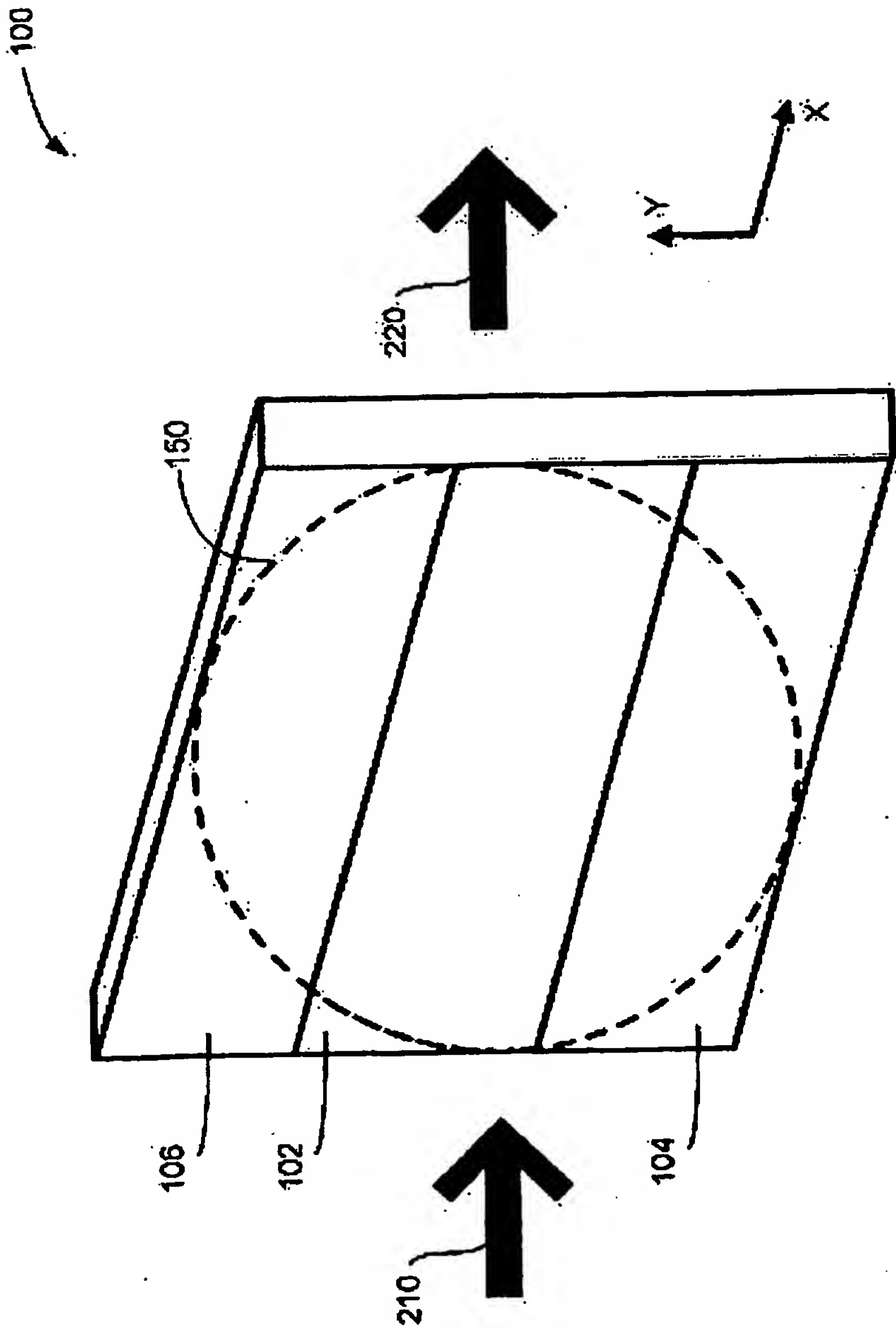
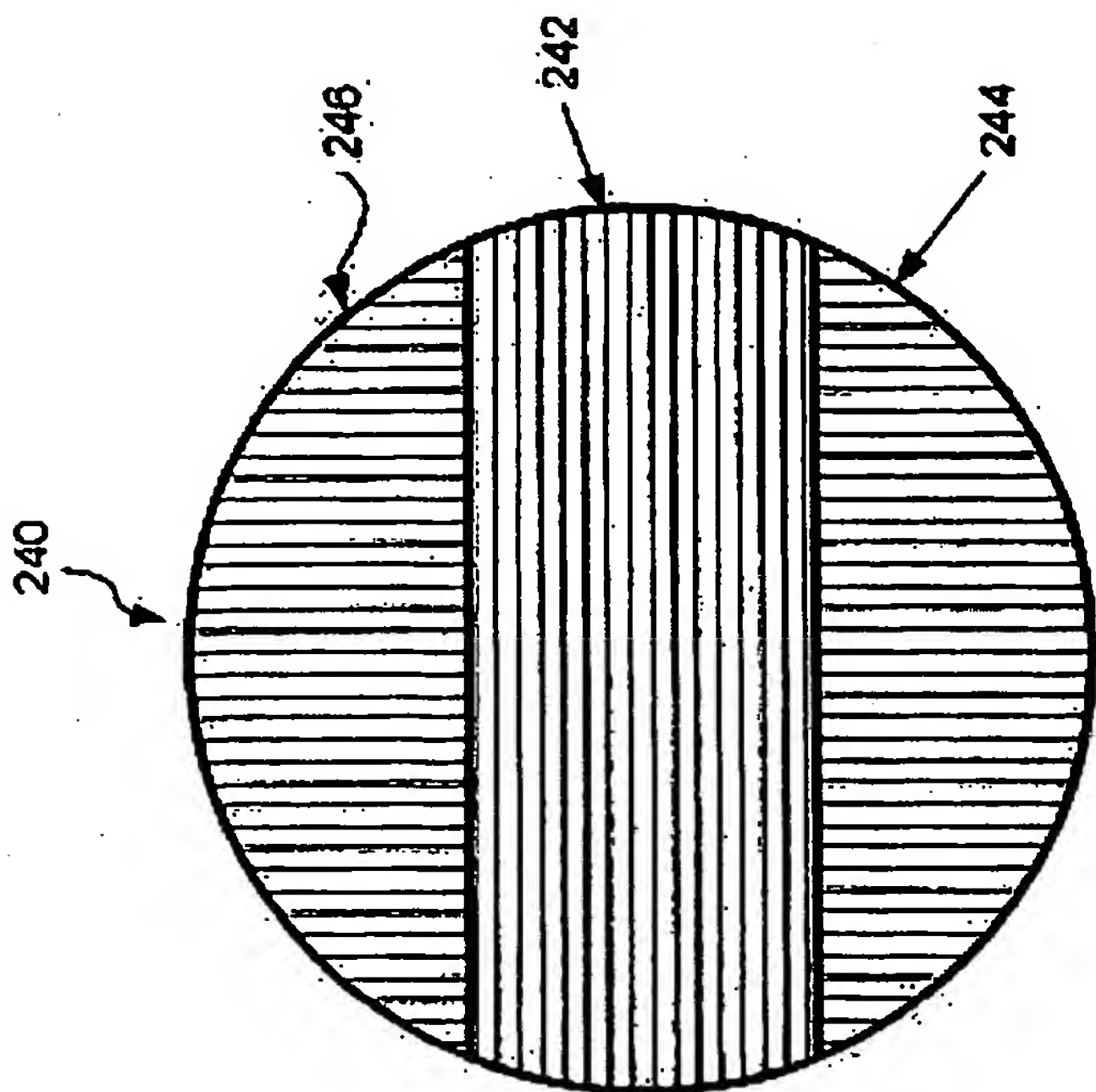
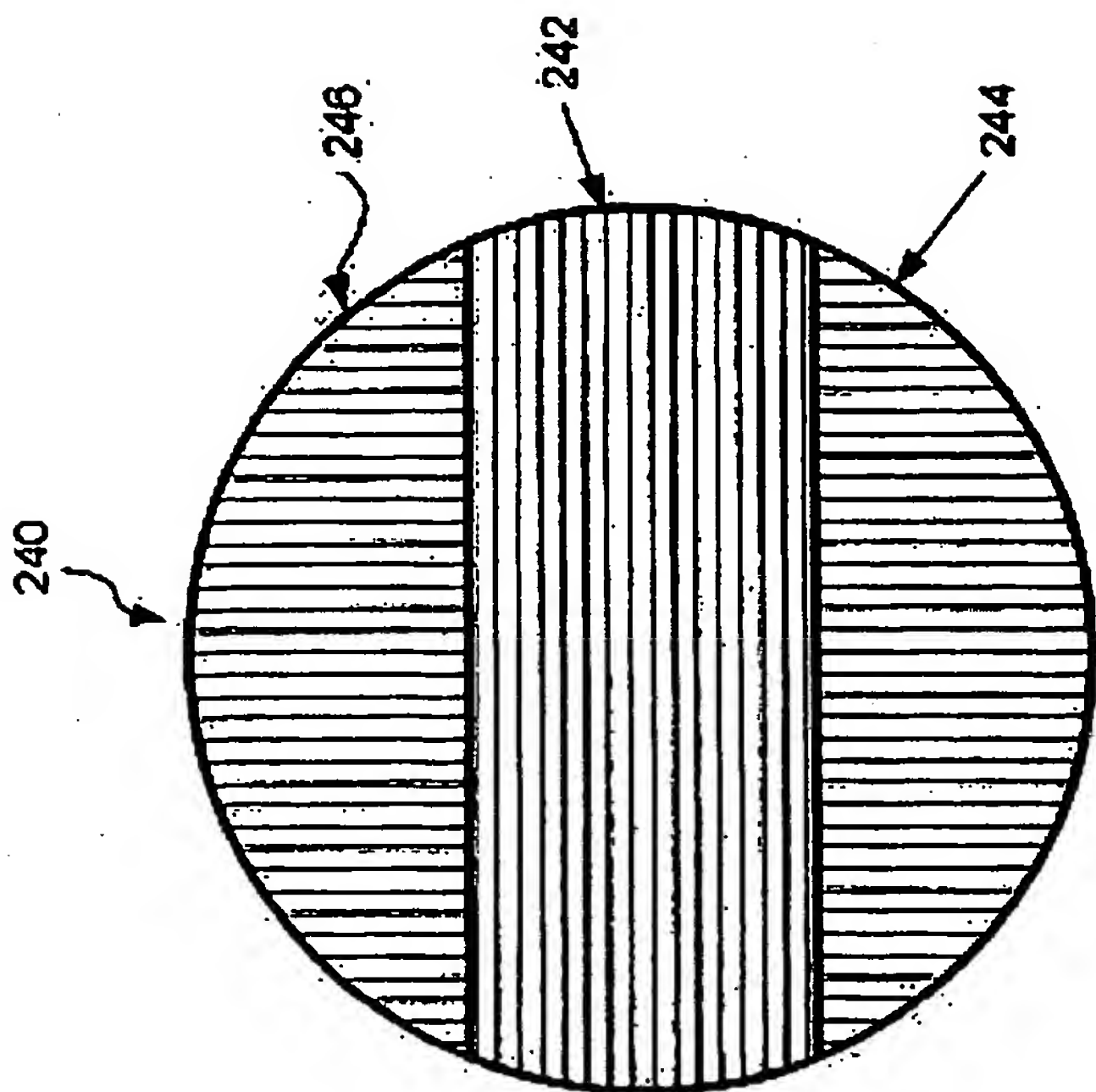


FIG. 2A



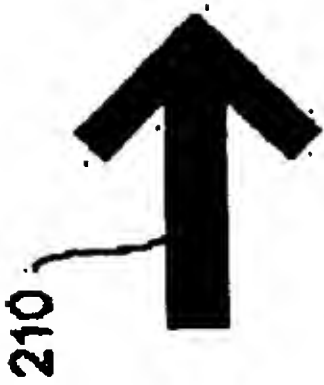
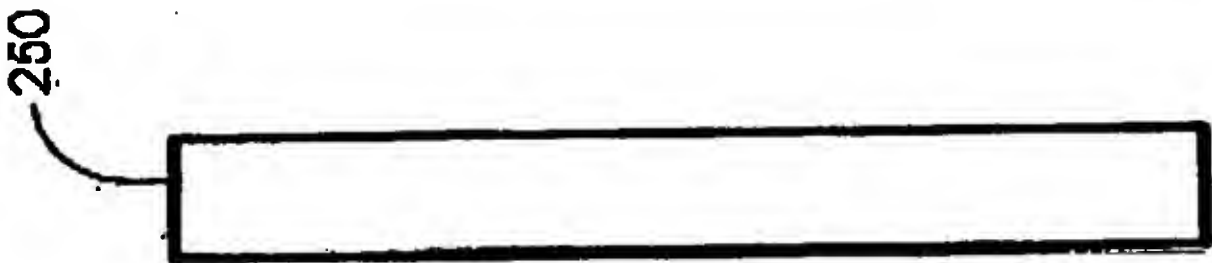
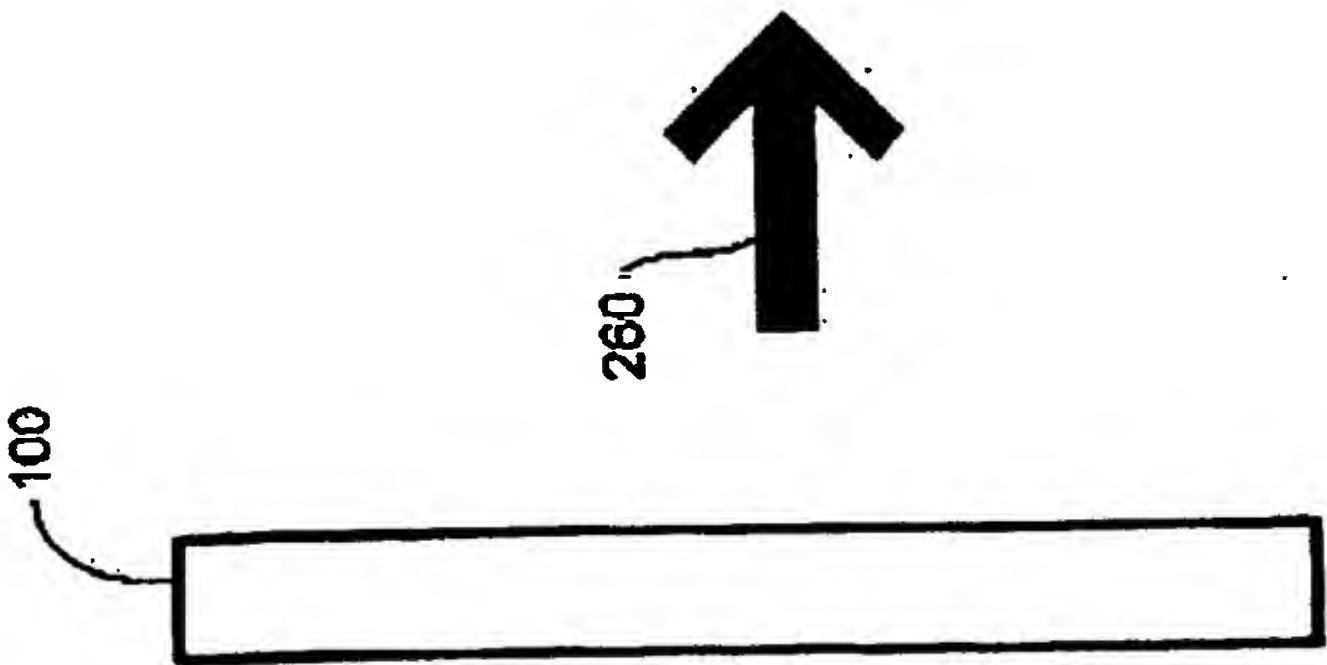
Horizontal input polarization

FIG. 2B



Vertical input polarization

FIG. 2C



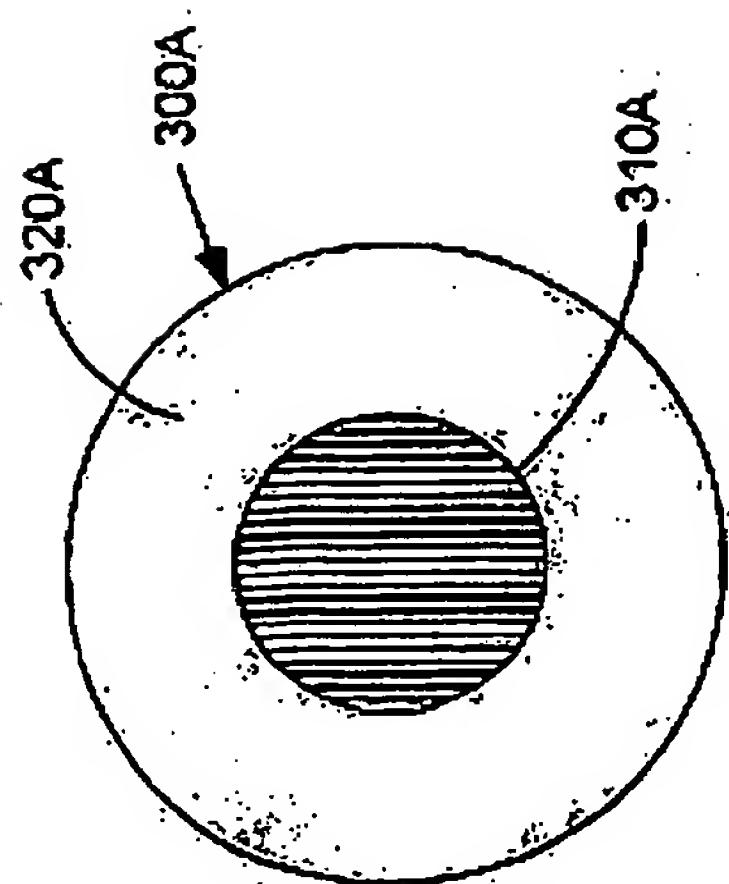


FIG. 3A

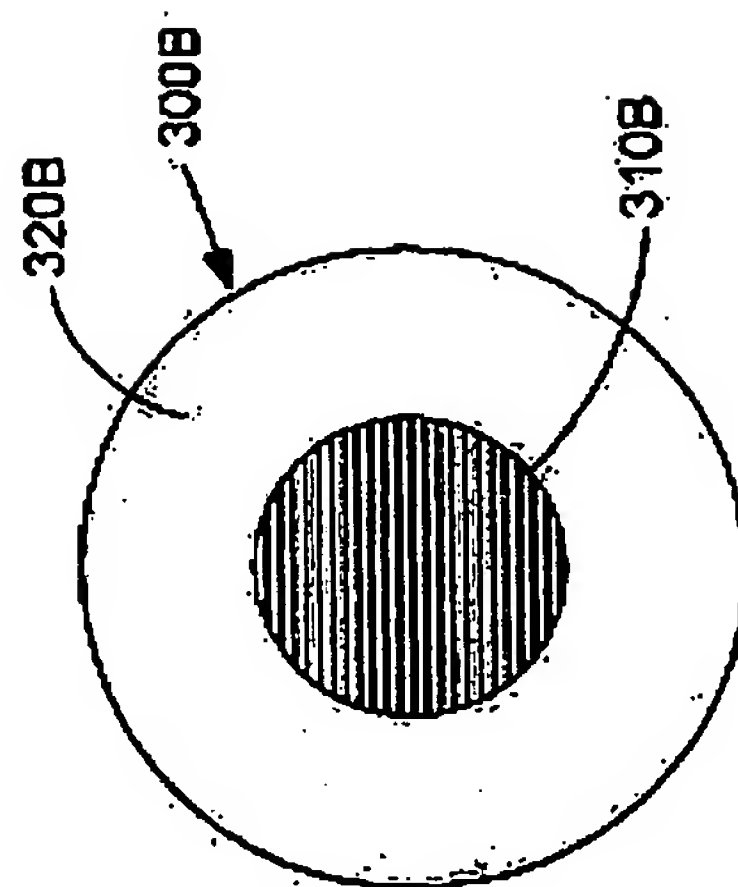
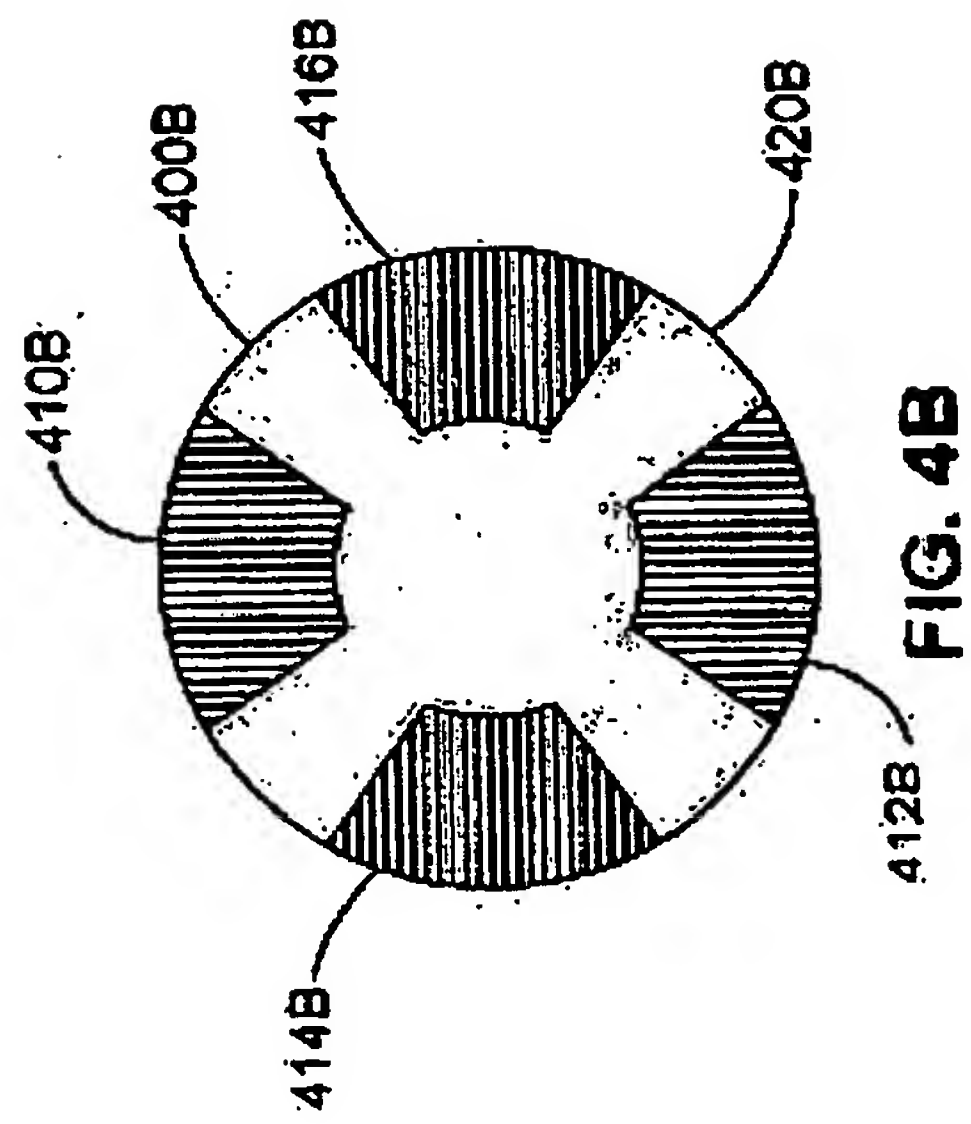
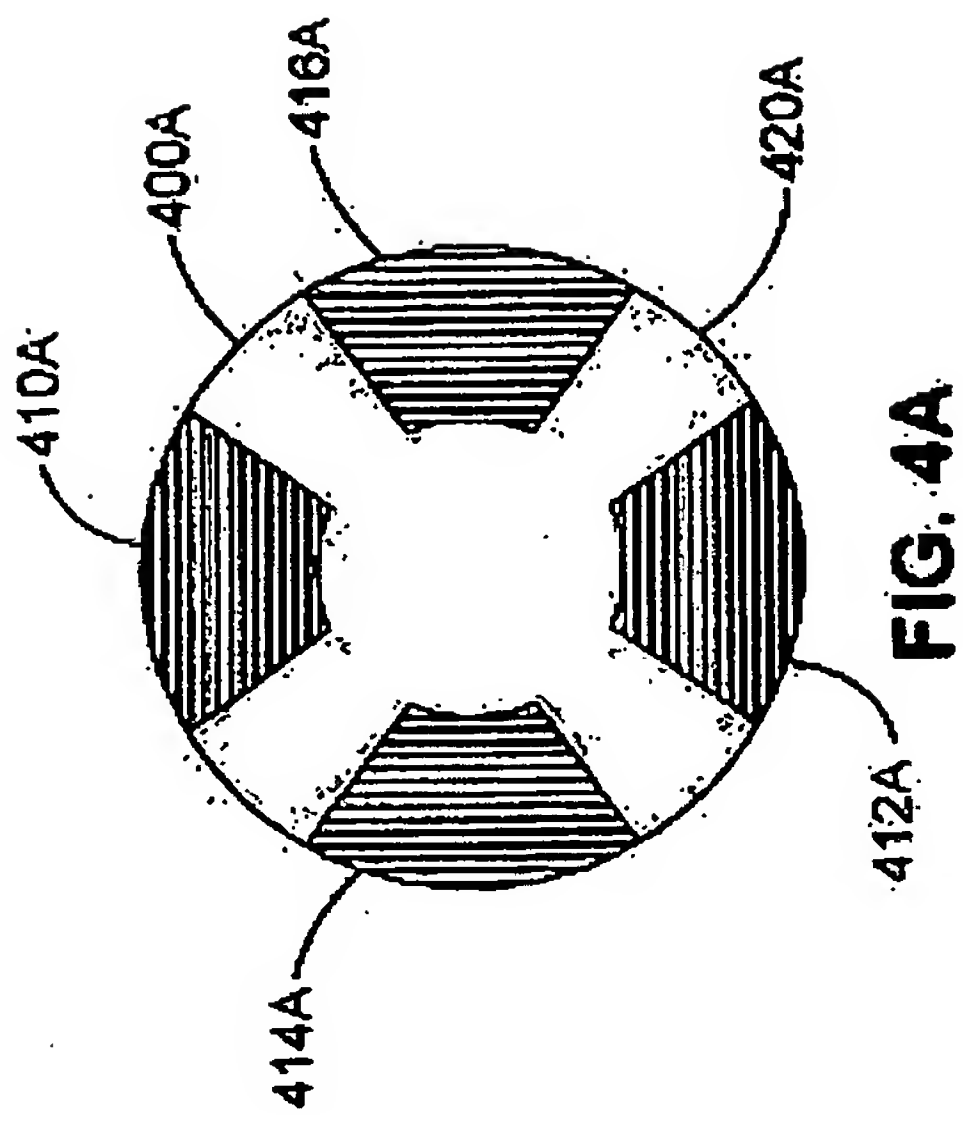
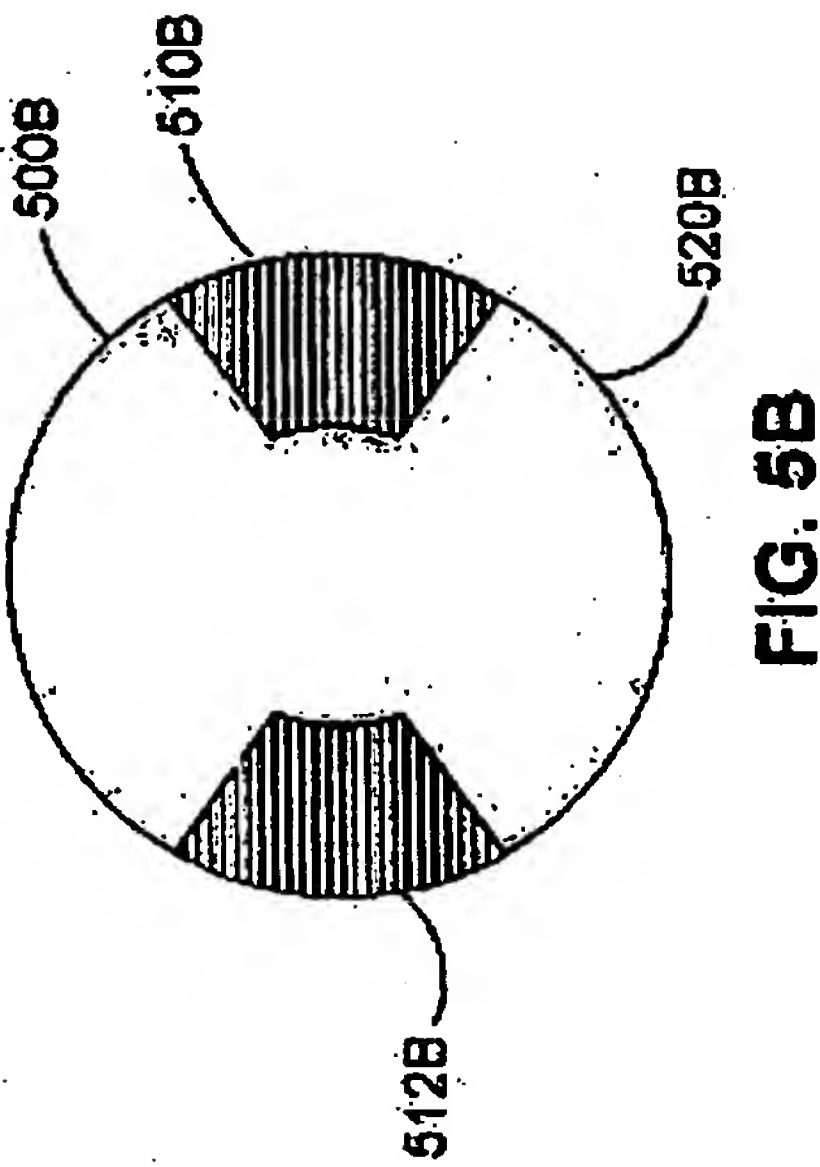
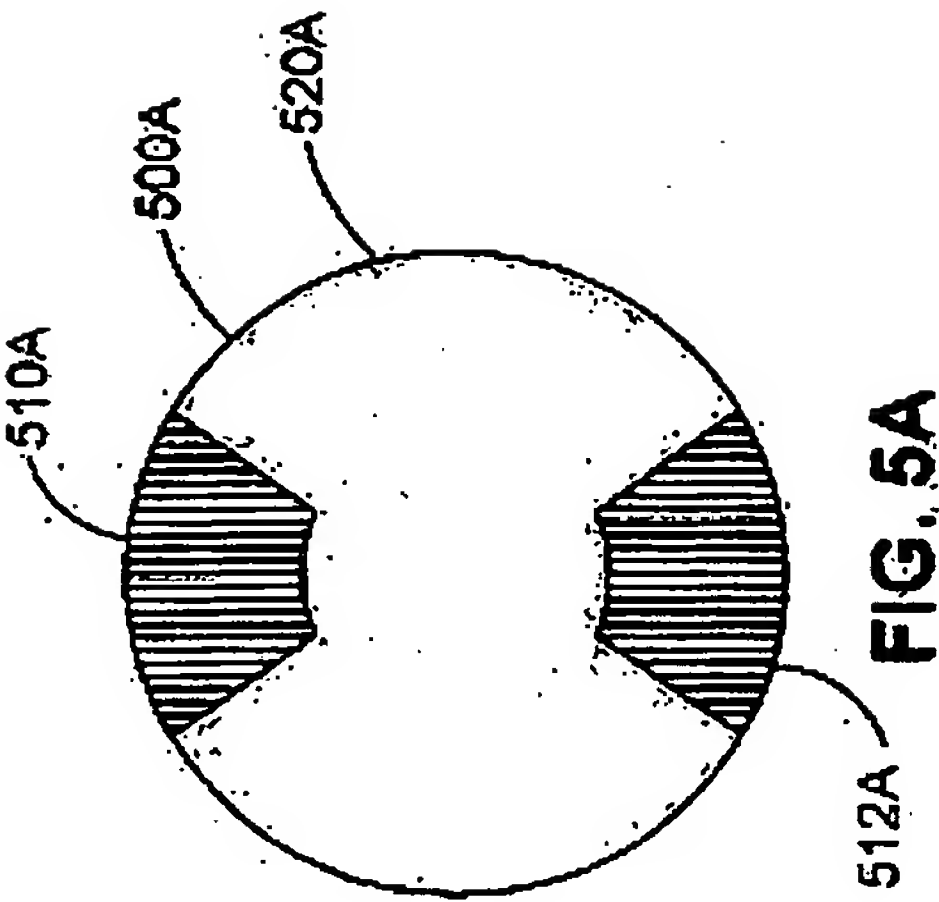


FIG. 3B





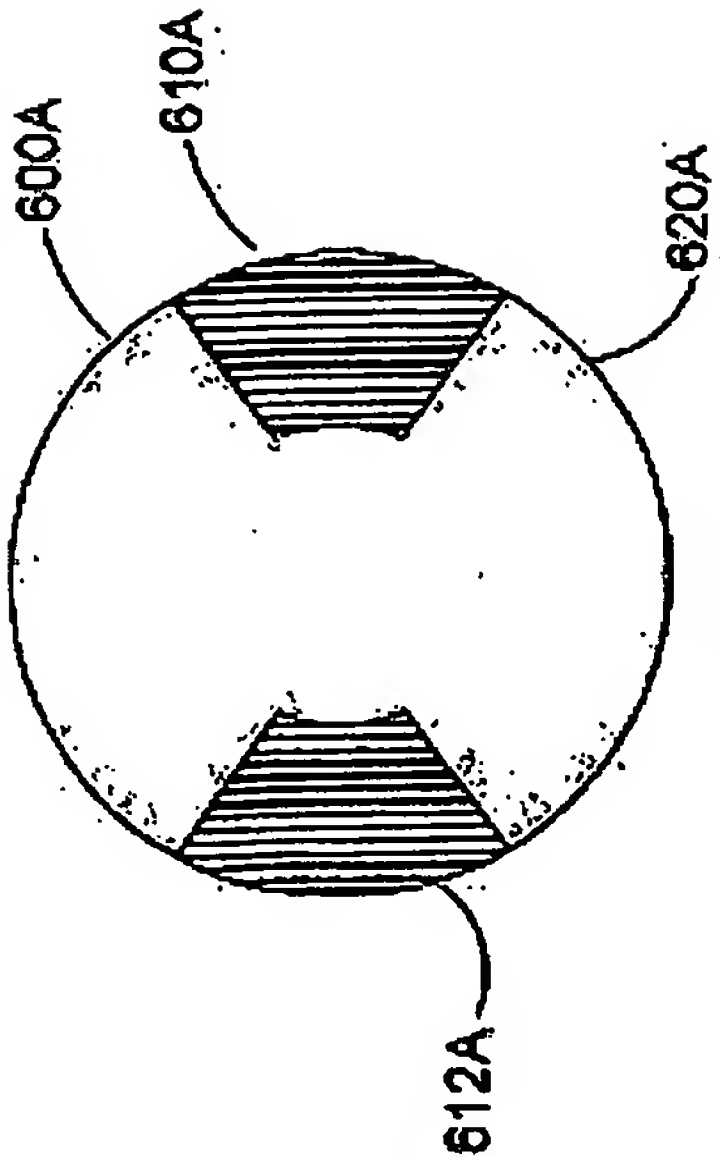


FIG. 6A

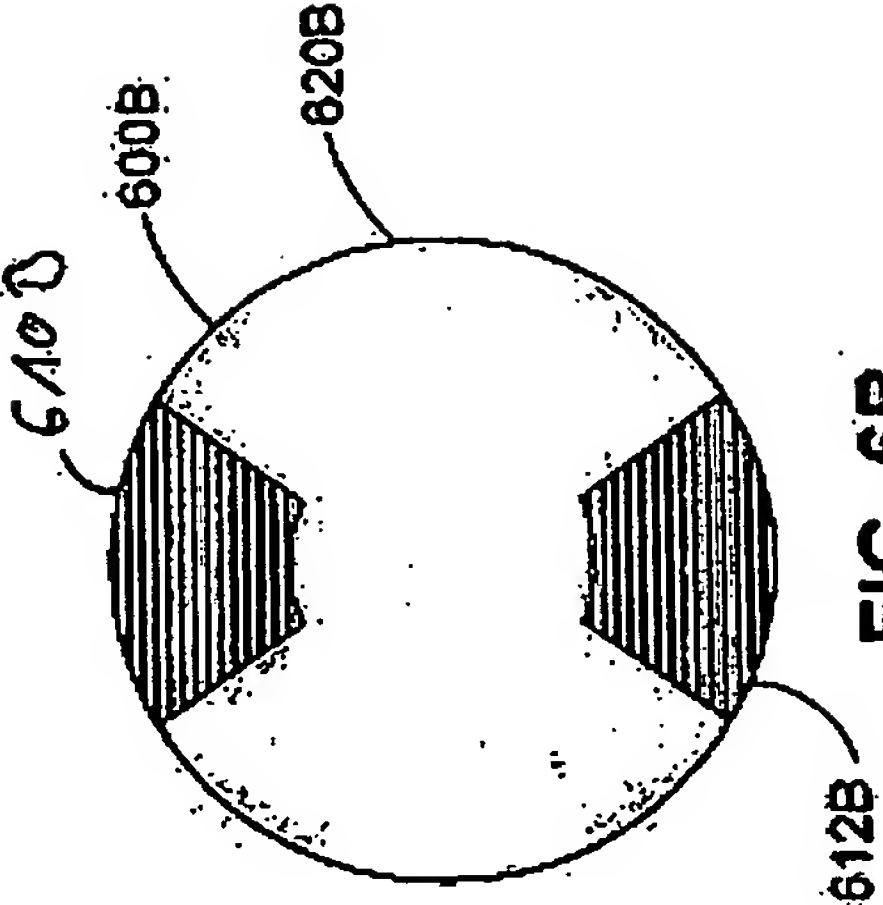


FIG. 6B

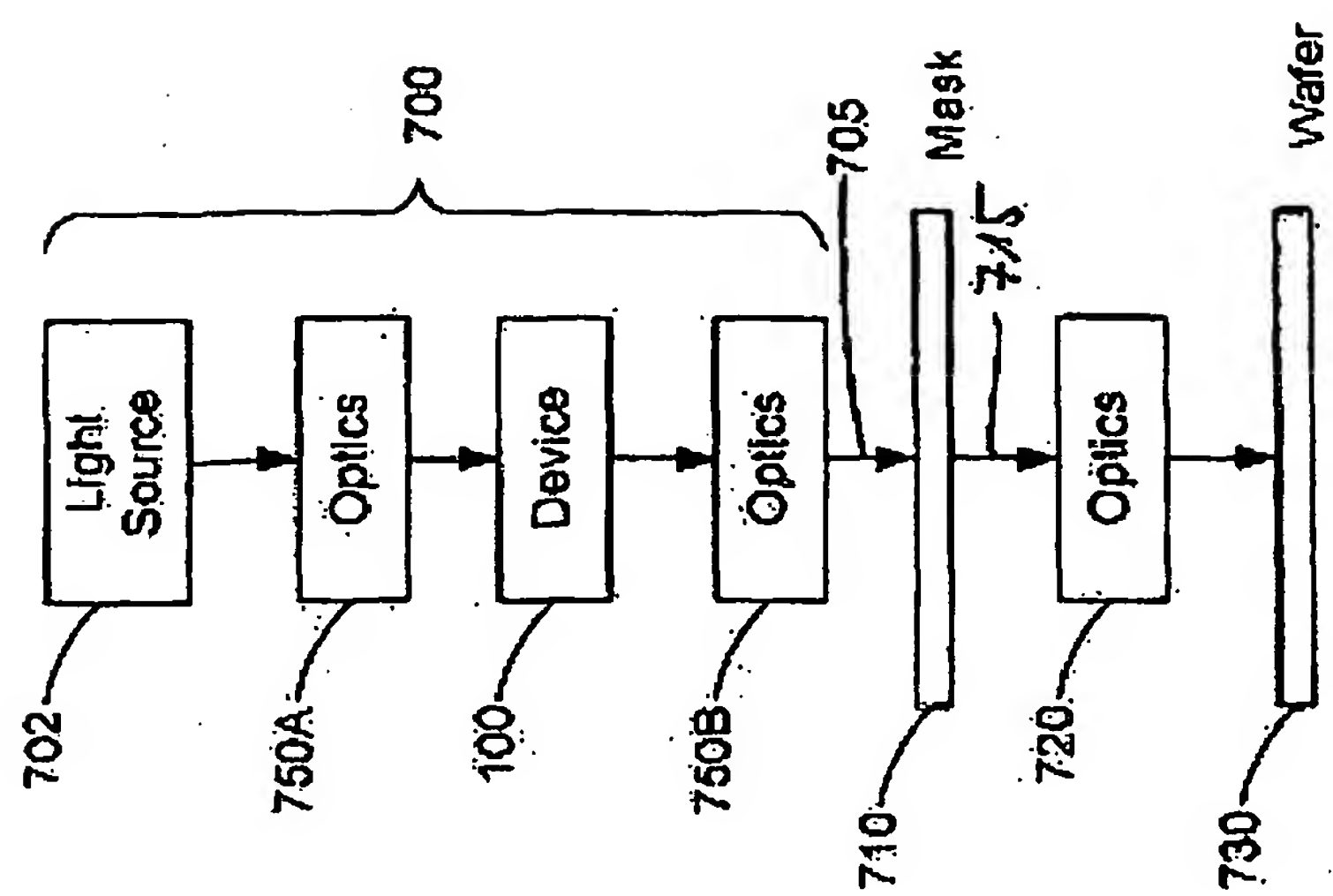


FIG. 7

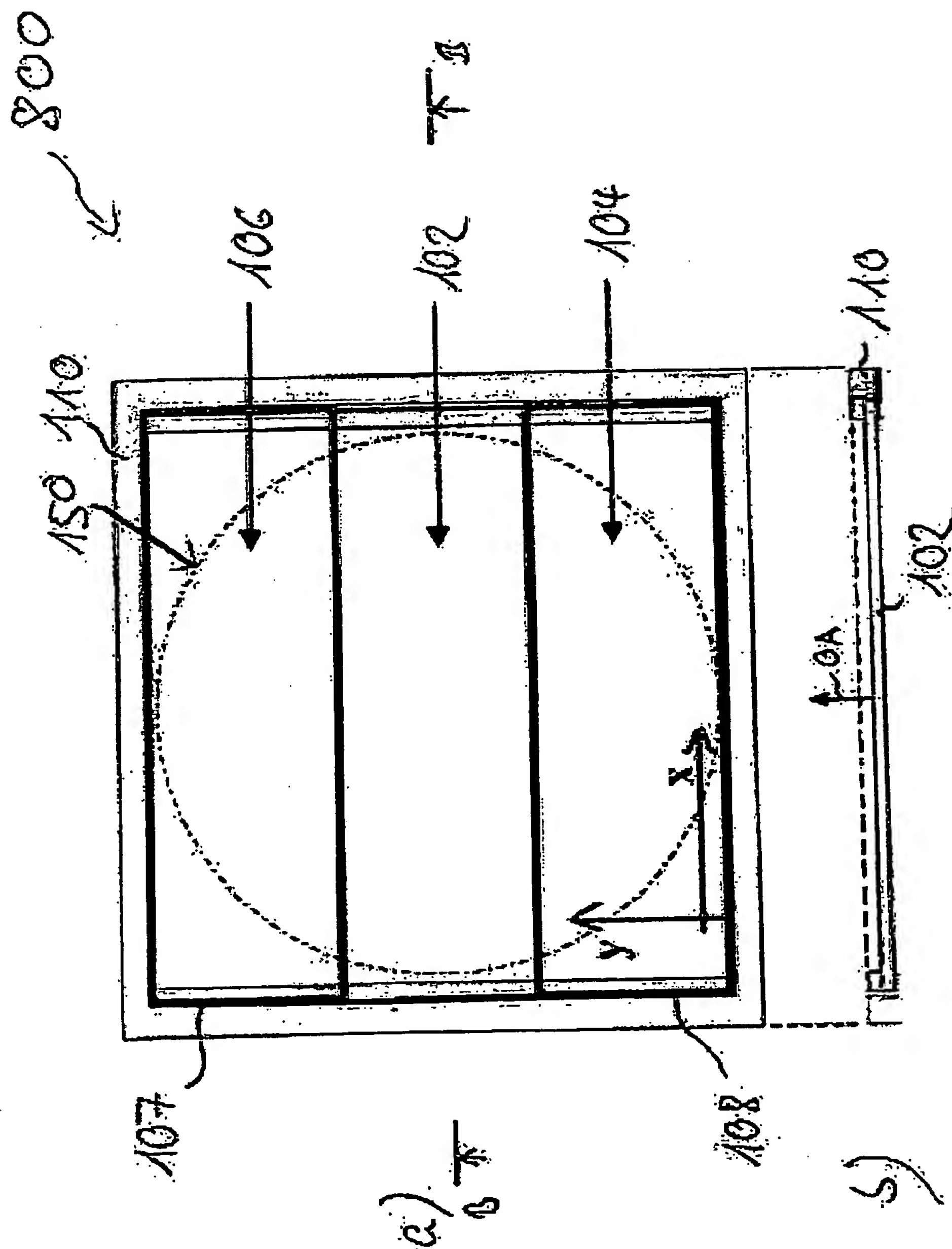


FIG..8

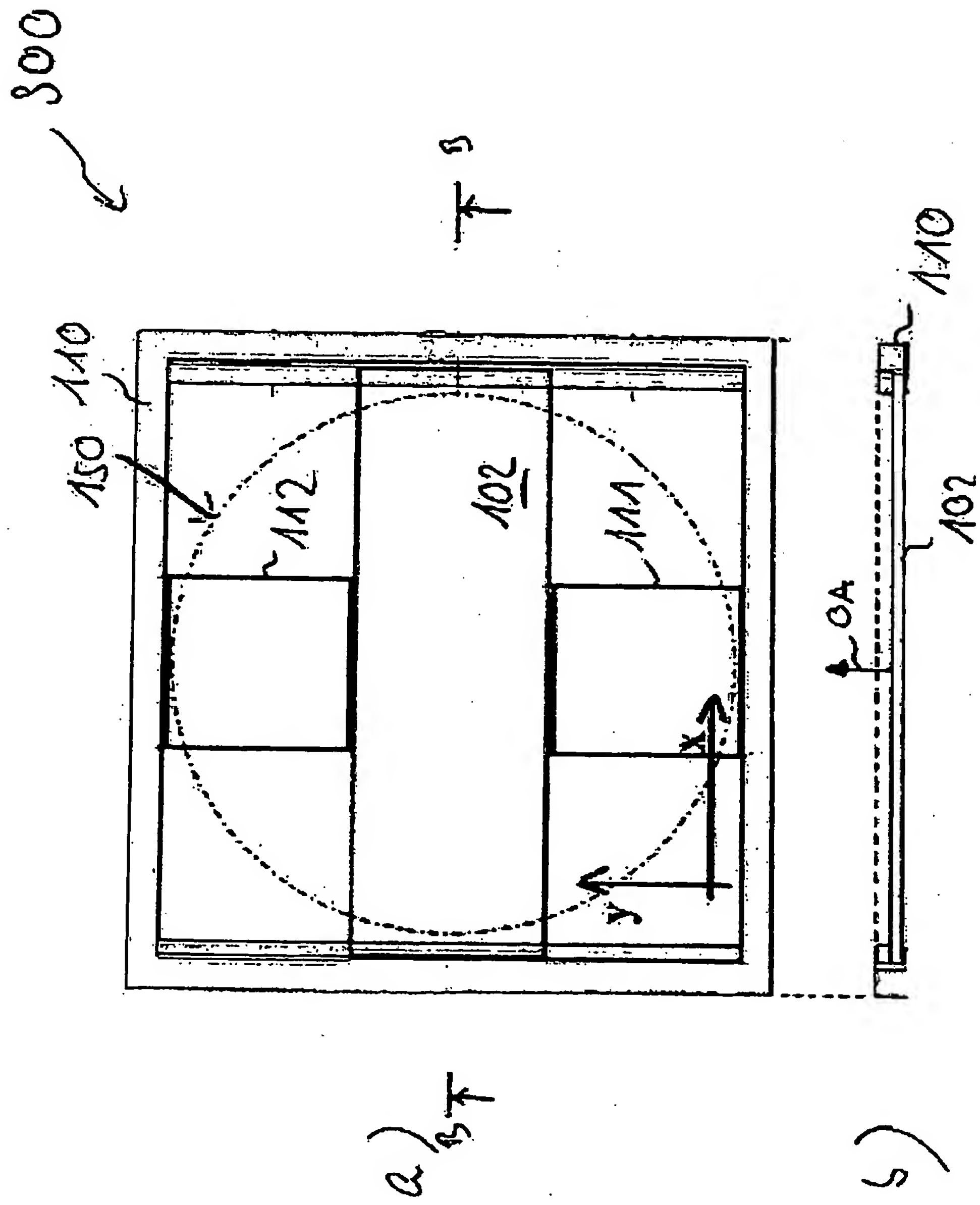


FIG. 9

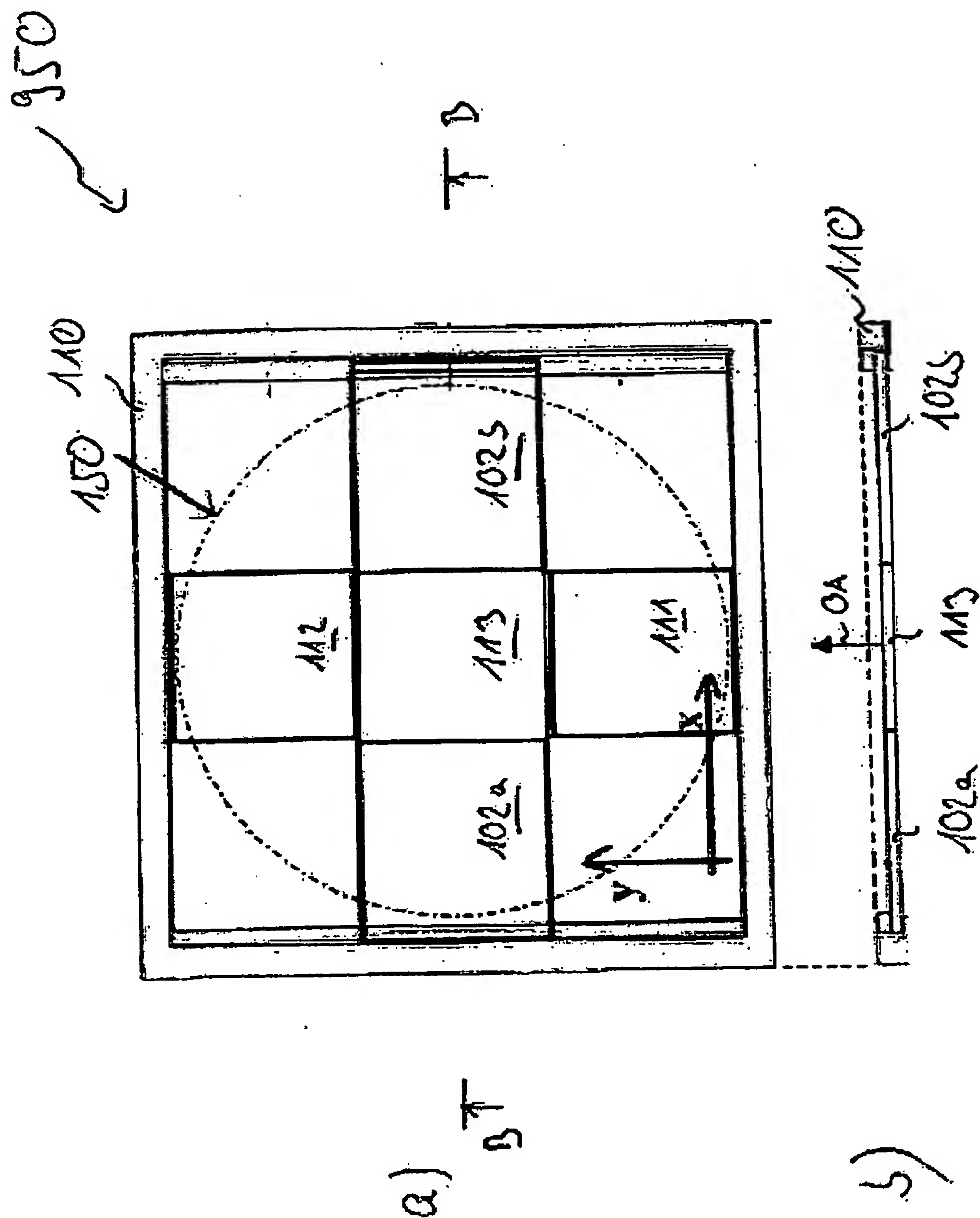


FIG.10

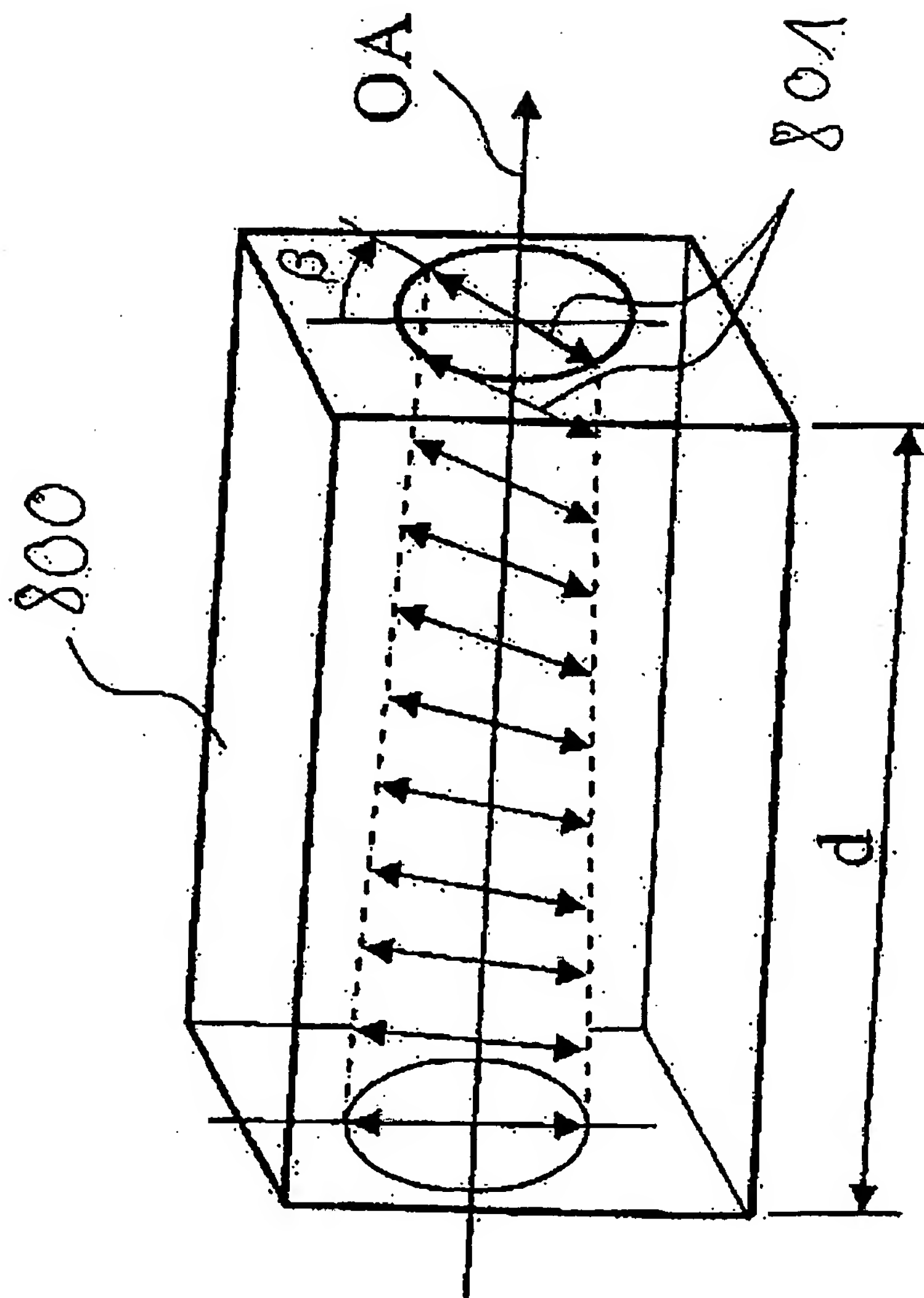


FIG.11

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
 IPC 7 G03F7/20 G02B5/30 G02B27/28

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
 IPC 7 G02B G03F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data, PAJ

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	GB 856 621 A (NATIONAL RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION) 21 December 1960 (1960-12-21) figure 4 page 3, line 11 - line 61 -----	1-5, 7-18, 20-31
P, X	US 6 721 258 B1 (HASHIMOTO NOBUYUKI) 13 April 2004 (2004-04-13) figure 3; example 3 column 8, line 25 - column 9, line 50 & WO 00/79331 A (CITIZEN WATCH CO., LTD; HASHIMOTO, NOBUYUKI) 28 December 2000 (2000-12-28) figure 3 -----	1,6-14, 19-31
X	US 6 191 880 B1 (SCHUSTER KARL-HEINZ) 20 February 2001 (2001-02-20) cited in the application figures 4a,4b,4c,4d -----	1,6-14, 19-31
X		1-5, 7-18, 20-31

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

- *A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance
- *E* earlier document but published on or after the international filing date
- *L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)
- *O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means
- *P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

- *T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
- *X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
- *Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.
- *g* document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

23 June 2005

Date of mailing of the international search report

28/07/2005

Name and mailing address of the ISA

European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2
 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk
 Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl,
 Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Quertemont, E

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
GB 856621	A	21-12-1960	NONE	
US 6721258	B1	13-04-2004	WO 0079331 A1	28-12-2000
WO 0079331	A	28-12-2000	WO 0079331 A1 US 6721258 B1	28-12-2000 13-04-2004
US 6191880	B1	20-02-2001	DE 19535392 A1 US 2002126380 A1 US 2001012154 A1 DE 59610745 D1 EP 1343051 A1 EP 0764858 A2 JP 9184918 A	27-03-1997 12-09-2002 09-08-2001 06-11-2003 10-09-2003 26-03-1997 15-07-1997

THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)